

2013

# New Orleans and Fazendeville (de) segregated : challenging a narrative of school integration

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NEW ORLEANS AND FAZENDEVILLE (DE)SEGREGATED:  
CHALLENGING A NARRATIVE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University  
and Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

the Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice

by  
April Antonellis  
B.A., New York University, 2008  
May 2013



*a requiem in five parts*

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor and thesis advisory committee chair, Dr. Petra Hendry, for her guidance, support and inspiration throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis. I would also like to thank my thesis advisory committee members: Dr. Kenneth Fasching-Varner and Dr. Joyce Jackson for their support and encouragement.

In addition to my committee members, I would also like to thank the following faculty of Louisiana State University for helping me shape my understanding of this field throughout the course of the last two years and pushing me to challenge assumed narratives: Dr. Denise Egéa-Kuehne of the Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice, and Dr. Carolyn Lewis and Dr. Andrew Burstein of the History Department. I would also like to thank Dr. Keena Arbuthnot of the Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice for helping me to overcome my fear of math, and dedicate Figures 4.5 and 4.6 to her.

I would also like to thank Mr. Dana Hart and Ms. Heather Stone, Ph.D. candidates in the Department of Educational Theory, Policy and Practice and members of my writing group, for reviewing, editing, critiquing, challenging, and generally vastly improving this product.

From Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve I would like to thank curator Kathy Lang for assisting me in my research and use of park archives, as well as park anthropologist Allison Peña for her guidance, inspiration and encouragement.

Finally, I thank my family for their love and encouragement, and especially Dave for being my biggest supporter and head cheerleader throughout this process. I dedicate this research to him.

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## **Abstract**

Too often, “integration” is a word only associated with the 1960s. The dominant narrative of education and integration in the South is simple and linear: African Americans were oppressed, then there was integration, then there was equality. However, in the case of New Orleans, the narrative is not so linear and not nearly so succinct. The conversation on integration began in New Orleans immediately following the Civil War, a century earlier than this conventional starting date, and yet despite generations of successes and drawbacks, the public schools of New Orleans continue to exist segregated today. Examining the narrative of school integration in New Orleans, along with the case study of Fazendeville, an African American community established in nearby St. Bernard Parish, reveals not a simple, linear narrative of school integration, but a complicated and cyclical one, with race central to this discourse. In addition to theorizing an historical narrative, this research also suggests that examining this narrative is a critical first step to developing a road map for the future to ensure that schools in New Orleans are able to serve all students equally.

## I. Introit

New Orleans, land of dreams  
You'll never miss them rice and beans  
Way down south in New Orleans<sup>1</sup>

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.<sup>2</sup>

There is no place quite like New Orleans. Its combination of distinct history and unique landscape has developed a culture and a lifestyle far different from any other. Its location at the nexus of the Western world –easily accessible by water from most of the United States, Africa, Europe and the Caribbean – has made it a major trading port and a bastion of social, economic, racial and cultural diversity.<sup>3</sup> Although geographically Southern, New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city with an economy historically built on trade rather than plantations. Paired with this is a starkly different colonial tradition, founded on the values of its licentious French Catholic settlers rather than the fundamentalist Protestant views of the English settlers in the north. Because of these factors, the culture, economy, and especially racial attitudes commonly associated with the rest of the South have always simply operated differently in New Orleans.<sup>4</sup>

The role of race in this society particularly, and cultural characteristics defining race are perhaps the most notable departure from traditional Southern ideologies.<sup>5</sup> In this urban pocket of great cultural heterogeneity, few broad conclusions drawn about the South and especially about

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<sup>1</sup> Spencer Williams, "Basin Street Blues," 1926.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Const. amend. XIV, §1.

<sup>3</sup> Dale A. Sommers, "Black and White in New Orleans: a study in urban race relations, 1865-1900" *The Journal of Southern History* 40, 1 (1974): 20.

<sup>4</sup> Louis R. Harlan, "Desegregation in New Orleans public schools during Reconstruction" *The American Historical Review* 67, 3 (1962): 674.

<sup>5</sup> Central to this argument is remembering that *race* is a cultural construction rather than a biological definition. What constitutes "black" is a relative function of time, society and place, with no scientific bearing.

the role of race apply to New Orleans, with white supremacy and black<sup>6</sup> inferiority “neither automatic nor implicit.”<sup>7</sup> It is a city of strange contrasts: fiercely Catholic, yet eminently care-free; wonderfully celebratory, yet perennially tragic; cultured and diverse, yet segregated and bifurcated. But perhaps it is natural for a city which has thrived despite being built on a swamp, prone to floodwaters, hurricanes and heavy rains to thumb its nose at convention. From its earliest colonial days, quickly abandoned by a French government that had dismissed it as a failed economic experiment, New Orleans developed a proud tradition of figuring it out on its own.<sup>8</sup> Yet tied to this spirit of independence, as a product of its prominent location and national significance, has come interest, influence, and often conflict with “foreigners”: those from outside New Orleans. This constantly evolving social environment has created a city where power and race are in constant conversation with each other.

This dialogue is perhaps best illuminated by examining the emergence of integrated schools in New Orleans. Too often, “integration” is a word only associated with the 1960s. The dominant narrative of education and integration in the South is simple and linear: African Americans were oppressed, then came *Brown*<sup>9</sup> and integration, and then there was equality.<sup>10</sup> However, in the case of New Orleans, the narrative is not so linear and not nearly so succinct. The conversation on integration began in New Orleans immediately following the Civil War a

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this research, I choose to not capitalize “white” or “black” when using them as racial identifiers. This choice seeks to highlight the arbitrary quality of skin color as a socially determining factor, and seeks to support the focus of this research on challenging traditional definitions of “white” and “black.”

<sup>7</sup> Roger A. Fischer, *The segregation struggle in Louisiana, 1862-77* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Shannon L. Dawdy, *Building the devil's empire French colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Dawdy explores the concept of “rogue colonialism,” a tension existing between the ideology and idealism of the French state, and the realities and survivalism of living in a mixed New World society for colonists. Dawdy isolates this “rogue colonialism” as a Creolized attitude that extended to every sphere of social life in the colony of New Orleans, from licentious social interactions to a casual rejection of colonial authority figures.

<sup>9</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*; 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>10</sup> Throughout this research, I use “equality” and “equity” at times seemingly interchangeably, but consciously. “Equality” suggests true social justice, and I will use this term most often when referring to ideal situations. “Equity” is used in to refer to even distribution of tangible items such as money or schools, even if it leaves wanting more fundamental and total change.



century earlier than this conventional starting date, and yet despite generations of successes and drawbacks, the public schools of New Orleans continue to exist segregated today. Through this research, I will examine the cyclical and complicated process of school integration in New Orleans, challenging the dominant narrative of a simple and linear process and arguing the centrality of race in constructing this discourse.

I will draw on an examination of an African American community called Fazendeville to further complicate this narrative. This unincorporated community, established just outside New Orleans in St. Bernard Parish around 1870,<sup>11</sup> was a subdivision of the property owned by New Orleans merchant and free man of color Jean-Pierre Fazende. This cheap land attracted a poor black population of former slaves interested in separating and settling down in peaceful segregation, separated from the race tensions in the nearby city. The community thrived through the Jim Crow Era, the Great Depression, and the Great Migration, witnessing the dissolution of so many similar communities across the South. But by the 1950s and 1960s, the same issues of segregation that established Fazendeville lead to its decline. The federal government, with little regard for the needs of black residents, bought up and tore down Fazendeville's houses, churches, school and grocery stores to make way for more valued history.

Although long interested in race and education, I first became acquainted with Fazendeville through my professional work at Chalmette Battlefield, the land on which Fazendeville once existed, today a War of 1812 site preserved by the National Park Service,<sup>12</sup> pictured in Figure 1.1. The unique story of Fazendeville is not one that we focus on at Chalmette

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<sup>11</sup> Fazendeville is unnamed but documented on an 1874 Mississippi River Commission map showing the property owners and structures. See figure 1.4. Although the Villages isn't labeled, its houses are laid out unmistakably in a long line, and precisely in the middle of the battlefield where Fazendeville would have been.

<sup>12</sup> Chalmette Battlefield is one of six units that make up Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, one of 402 National Park Service sites in the United States. I have worked at Jean Lafitte NHP & Pres. since 2011, and the National Park Service since 2008. Although an employee of the park, most of the research and writing of this report was done in my personal time, and reflects only my own opinions and conclusions, and not necessarily those of the park, the National Park Service, or the Department of the Interior.

Battlefield since it is seen as secondary to the military story. This omission prompted me to explore further, questioning the role of race in determining whose history is of value, and how race functions in constructing narratives on integration. As I learned about “the Village” and particularly its one-room school, I wondered how it would fit as a microcosm of New Orleans and its narrative on integration. Does Fazendeville further reinforce the dominant narrative of integration, or the counter-narrative of New Orleans? Perhaps not surprisingly, I found that it does neither. Fazendeville exists as yet another concentric layer, further challenging and questioning what we accept as the narrative. But when all laid out, these concentric circles and layers of complication have a common core: race.

This research is an autoethnographic examination using archival sources to theorize the role that race has played in the construction of a narrative of integrated schools, through critical

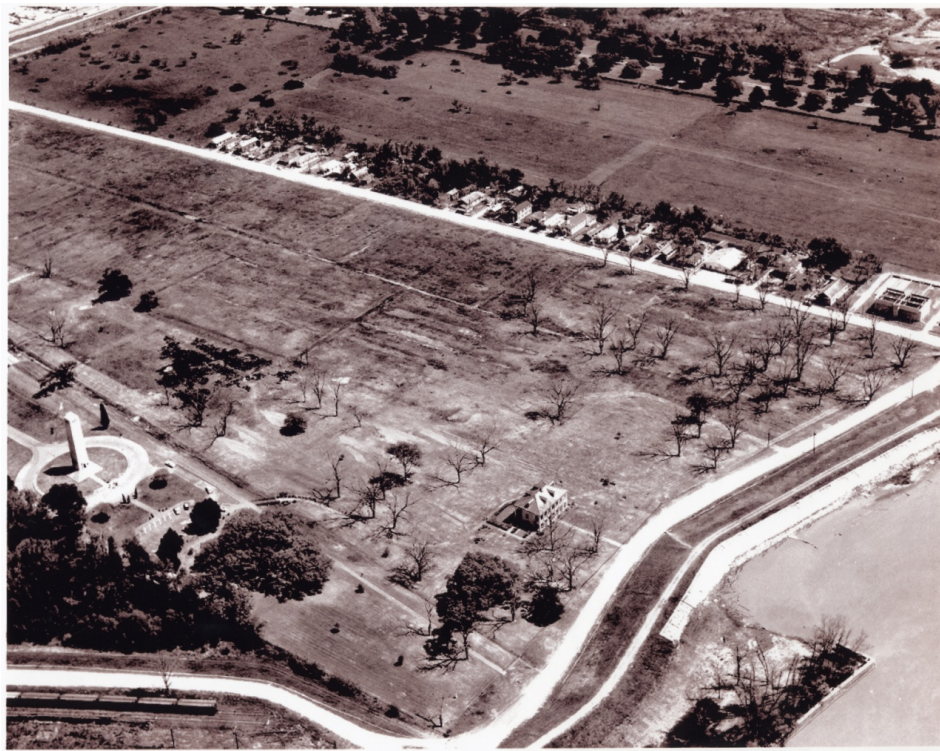


Figure 1.1: Photograph of Fazendeville, with Chalmette Monument and National Cemetery, undated<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

race theory (CRT) analysis. I will focus on the role of the property value of whiteness through this story of integration, and how challenging traditional understandings of race has, continues to, and will always further complicate and queer the metanarrative of integration. This research seeks to ask four primary questions:

- 1) What is the narrative of school integration in New Orleans and how does it differ from the dominant narrative of integration?
- 2) How does focusing on the black community of Fazendeville further challenge the dominant narratives of school integration?
- 3) What role does race play in the construction of these counternarratives of school integration?
- 4) How do considering the property value of whiteness and challenging traditional understandings of race help to theorize race in the narrative (and counternarrative) of integration in New Orleans?

I structure this exploration after a requiem – a traditional funeral mass. In the New Orleans tradition, a funeral is not a sad affair – for only through death can the ideal be achieved. Funerals allow pause to recognize life, and celebrate its passing from a world of pain and suffering into an imagined paradise of harmony and equality. This research will examine the “life” of integration by chronicling the cycle of development and decline that has been the history of the (de)segregated schools of New Orleans. I also celebrate the ultimate and current failure of integration, marking this death with the envisionment of a system of education built on equality, which celebrates rather than circumvents race.

## **Background**

The free people of color of New Orleans, unlike many Blacks in the South, have always had access to education, including the options of forming apprenticeships to learn a trade, attending private or parochial New Orleans academies for people of color to learn a “Latin”

curriculum, or being sent away for a formal and classical education in the North or in Europe.<sup>14,15</sup>

Among these options, choice was closely tied to wealth and social status.<sup>16</sup> The widespread existence of black education in New Orleans challenges the dominant narrative of black illiteracy and ignorance in the antebellum period. Like so many other phenomena creating a cultural cognitive dissonance contrasted to the dominant and accepted story, it is often simply ignored.

And so, the discussion on black education in the South usually commences with the Freedman's Bureau during with the Civil War, hailed erroneously as the first attempt at black education. Howard Ashley White's classic survey *The Freedman's Bureau in Louisiana*<sup>17</sup> squarely affirms this narrative. White provides an overview of the role of the Freedman's Bureau in reconstructing many aspects of black society following the Civil War: including labor, political enfranchisement and property ownership, with a special emphasis on education.

The Freedman's Bureau provided spaces for classrooms in buildings seized by the Union Army as well as financial support. The guidance was often more philosophical than concrete, with no kind of curriculum issued, or specific guidelines on how to operate schools.<sup>18</sup> And so,

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<sup>14</sup> Although all black students were restricted from accessing the public education network of the city, there were private education options available for both wealthy and indigent free black students. This included the *Institute Catholique des Orphelins Indigents*, financed both from tuition paid by those who could afford it, and from charity gathered for those who could not.

<sup>15</sup> There are few reliable statistics reporting number of black students receiving an education in New Orleans in the antebellum period. This is partly due to the informal and broadly defined characteristic of much of the antebellum education system for black students and partly due to the fluidity of racial categorization and racial "passing" common in New Orleans at the time, especially among the wealthy people of color in the best position to provide a formal education for their children. The 1860 census reports 275 black students in the entire state of Louisiana, most if not all of which would have been in New Orleans. This figure likely does not include students learning by apprenticeship, likely does not include some mixed-race students "passing" at white schools, and certainly does not include the black students who were sent abroad or to the North for their education.

<sup>16</sup> Much has been written on black education in New Orleans before the Civil War. See: H.E. Sterkx, *The free Negro in ante-bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972); John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Marie Fabre, "New Orleans Creoles Expatriates in France: Romance and Reality," in *Creole*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Howard Ashley White, *The Freedman's Bureau in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> Randall M. Miller, "The Freedman's Bureau and Reconstruction: an overview," in *The Freedman's Bureau: reconsiderations*, ed. Paul A. Cimbal and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), xxvii.

schools were established before there were even teachers assigned to lead them, relying heavily on the pre-war tradition of black education, and the educated black population to serve as educators.<sup>19</sup> Most of these schools focused on teaching only basic reading and writing skills, with some moving into vocational education – trades for boys and sewing and cooking for girls. The progress was halting, and the quality of education variable. But still, for many it permitted a new window into a world of formal education never before experienced.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the informality of this system, it was a successful one. By the end of the war in 1865, New Orleans had 28 black schools, serving 4,756 students. Nearly 85 percent of the black youth population of the city was enrolled in a black school by war's end.<sup>21</sup> White argues that “the accomplishments of the Freedman's Bureau in education in Louisiana seemed at the time little more than lighting a weak candle in a dark night, but that it burned at all despite the gusty winds of the Reconstruction Era was a magnificent achievement.”<sup>22</sup> This ode to the Freedman's Bureau does not acknowledge that its greatest accomplishment was not in establishing mediocre schools, but in paving the way for future successes by establishing a precedent for free public black education – separate, although not yet unequal. This conclusion, that the system of education established by the Freedman's Bureau was at best a means to an end, is one that many other historians have also reached.

White's contemporary, historian Joe Gray Taylor, goes further in his argument, stating that although temporary opportunities were created, Reconstruction on the whole was a social

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<sup>19</sup>Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: teaching, learning, and the struggle for black freedom 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Limited education options existed for slave children before the Civil War as an 1830 law expressly forbid the education of slaves, and cost could be prohibitive for many. The Ursuline nuns and the Sisters of the Holy Family, among other religious orders, navigated around this by teaching basic literacy to slaves through catechism, however on the whole, slaves were illiterate and uneducated in the antebellum period.

<sup>21</sup> C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 143-5.

<sup>22</sup> White, *The Freedman's Bureau in Louisiana*, 199.

failure.<sup>23</sup> Taylor argues that the source of this failure was a product of Reconstruction being too significant a break from the past rather than developed from within Southern society. Taylor presents a very anti-Reconstruction perspective, shrugging off the hardships of the black population as equal to that of poor Southern Whites,<sup>24</sup> and sympathizing with the great social transformation and upheaval experienced by elite Whites.<sup>25</sup>

Randall M. Miller and Paul A. Cimbala represent the next generation of historians, who would not agree with the distillation made by White and Taylor that a lack of Southern autonomy was the source of Reconstruction disappointment. In their collection of essays, *The Freedman's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations*<sup>26</sup> they challenge these traditional Anglo-centric criticisms of Reconstruction, and consider instead how white power structures and conscious efforts of disenfranchisement undermined black agency.

Within this context, historian Caryn Cossé Bell focuses on the inextricable connection between the Freedman's Bureau and the political power structure of Reconstruction within the sphere of education.<sup>27</sup> She agrees with White in suggesting that school construction was a notable hallmark of the Freedman's Bureau, but suggests that their true legacy was in their being launched by the freed people themselves rather than bestowed upon them as White and Taylor suggest. Bell argues that once these black institutions were established, they would have been better off left alone, with their ultimate failure stemming from outside intervention by white

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<sup>23</sup> Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863 – 1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Although I consciously choose to lowercase “black” and “white” as adjectives, I will capitalize when using as nouns to distinguish as a group of like-identified people. Although I try to avoid this, preferring not to use skin color as an identification, in times when it is impossible or awkward to avoid, I will use the capital case.

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, in this paper I will make the same observation as Taylor – that the failure of Reconstruction, and more contemporary efforts at affecting social change, was a product of disenfranchisement – yet we reach indeed opposite conclusions on who was disenfranchised and at whose expense, and what the outcome of that disenfranchisement was.

<sup>26</sup> Miller and Cimbala, ed.s *The Freedman's Bureau and Reconstruction: reconsiderations*.

<sup>27</sup> Caryn Cossé Bell, “‘Une Chimère: the Freedmen's Bureau in Creole New Orleans,” in Miller and Cimbala, ed.s *The Freedman's Bureau and Reconstruction: reconsiderations*, 140-60.

Northerners and Southerners alike trying to reconfigure for various political reasons an education system that was already highly functioning.<sup>28</sup>

Bell attributes the rigor of this black agency to an “Afro-Creole protest tradition,” which she argues set New Orleans on an entirely different trajectory when it came to race and power dynamics contributing to and directing integration.<sup>29</sup> Bell identifies a biracial protest movement dating back to the earliest colonial history of New Orleans, the product of a mixed-race, French-derived society where racist social divisions along color lines were not nearly as important or pronounced as in other areas of the modern United States. Especially for the increasingly affluent, politically-connected and well-educated Creoles of color of New Orleans, inspired by the French Revolution utopian ideals of *liberté, fraternité, égalité*, this spirit of protest was kept alive as long as they maintained a dominant social position. This “Afro-Creole protest tradition,” Bell argues, extended into every social sphere: politics, civil rights, and of course education.

As time went on, and as generations had passed since any Louisianan considered themselves a French national, “American” cultural and social values derived from Protestant cultural practices and a racist society built on the back of slave labor eclipsed the French and Spanish colonial tradition. Leading into the Civil War, life and society quickly changed for the mixed-race, middle-class free black population of New Orleans. Although in the antebellum period the French and Caribbean cultural and social influences on the city permitted a three-tiered society allowing a higher social status to the free black and mixed-race people, the increasingly influential American social structure made no such allowances. By the onset of war, Louisiana society demanded a binary of identity – white or black – with Whites of any class or

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<sup>28</sup> Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 272-3. This argument supporting segregated black institutions will be revived periodically throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, even today some scholars – Derrick Bell, Jonathan Kozol – would argue segregated institutions are necessary to close the black achievement gap.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

wealth on top, and Blacks regardless of education or economic factors, underneath. This social transformation lumped together the economically, socially and culturally diverse members of the black population as commonly marginalized and second-class citizens. Although the middle-class and affluent black classes maintained their affluence from before the war, they no longer had the same cultural capital or political clout. Their social position and their independent social institutions, including the system of education, quickly eroded. This was resuscitated by the Freedman's Bureau, and reenergized by Reconstruction.

When Reconstruction got into full swing, New Orleans finally had its opportunity to experiment with integrated public schools. Robert A. Fischer argues in *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*<sup>30</sup> that broadly the attempt to ensure an equal society in Reconstruction was ultimately a failure. He isolates New Orleans alone as the only successful school integration story of the Reconstruction period. "The public school question" of providing equal access to education, and possibly even integrated schools emerged as an issue with wide support across racial and political lines during the 1867 Constitutional Convention. In the process of constructing a new post-war government, there were no outspoken arguments against black education – indeed most Whites supported teaching black students knowledge and skills to become good citizens.

Although the population of New Orleans was only about 20 percent black in 1867,<sup>31</sup> the Constitutional Convention had a "one-half guaranty" that black Republicans would have an equal share of seats as conservative Whites. This not only gave black politicians a role in the construction of the new government, it ensured that "black" issues which enjoyed even moderate support from white lawmakers would be adopted. This coalition of white and black delegates

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<sup>30</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-1877*.

<sup>31</sup> United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *1970 Census of the Population: Characteristics of the Population*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972.



“succeeded in incorporating key elements of the [Republican] platform into the state constitution,”<sup>32</sup> most notably integrated public schools.

By 1868, the new constitution was adopted, re-admitting Louisiana to the Union, and allowing Reconstruction to finally begin in New Orleans. The provision for equal access to education was easily the most radical article of this new document. The new constitution called for the state government to establish free and fully integrated public schools where specifically, “there shall be no separate schools or institutions of learning established exclusively for any race by the State of Louisiana.”<sup>33</sup> Perhaps most radically, this constitution was easily approved, by a vote of 61 to 12.<sup>34</sup>

However, this golden age for integration would not last long. When Radical Reconstruction ended in 1877, the Northern-empowered “carpetbaggers” retreated and “home rule” was restored in Louisiana. One of the first actions of the newly empowered was the closure of the integrated schools, a move which garnered little public outcry. These schools were not popular, with a majority of Whites *and* Blacks preferring separate institutions.<sup>35</sup> The tentative racial harmony that existed during Reconstruction had disappeared by the 1880s, with those “foreign” dominant racist attitudes from elsewhere in the United States and especially the elites of nearby Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas taking on greater prominence. The unique racial, social, and cultural *mélange* that thrived in New Orleans before the Civil War and even into Reconstruction had faded, and for the first time in its history, New Orleans was truly Southern.

This newfound Southern identity is exemplified by how quickly the unique narrative of race and integration in New Orleans began to resemble the dominant Southern narrative. In

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<sup>32</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868*, 272.

<sup>33</sup> L.A. Const., title VII, art. 135

<sup>34</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

addition to pressure from neighboring states, fear and frustration by Whites with less political clout and a weaker economy after Reconstruction joined together to create a dramatic anti-black shift in perceptions occurring throughout the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Deteriorating conditions in black schools and black homes across the south and including in New Orleans seen in Figure 1.2 were a notable product of this Jim-Crow era enthusiasm for segregation and fear of a rising black population.<sup>36</sup>

But Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon, in their essential survey *Crescent City Schools*, argue that this steady decline from 1877 to 1900 was not reactionary, but slow and deliberate.<sup>37</sup> By 1900, neither society nor its schools remotely resembled their pre-war appearance. Schools



Figure 1.2: Photograph of a black neighborhood in New Orleans, c. 1900<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon. *Crescent City Schools: public education in New Orleans 1841 – 1991* (New Orleans: University of Southwestern Louisiana Center for Louisiana Studies, 1991), 82.

<sup>38</sup> George François Mugnier; “Genre Scene,” Mugnier Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University; Baton Rouge, La.

were steadfastly segregated, with a growing rift in quality between the schools for Whites and the schools for Blacks, and draconian budget cuts introduced in the post-Reconstruction period affecting black schools disproportionately.<sup>39</sup> By 1900, the schools for black students that remained were mostly vocational, teaching only the most rudimentary literacy and numeracy skills, education consistent with the accepted black role in society as a laborer. Students were far worse off than they were before Reconstruction, with education options and opportunities after increasingly limited.

With the Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>40</sup> at the end of the century, this segregation was only further justified and normalized. Entrenched in the New Orleans Afro-Creole protest tradition, light-skinned New Orleans Creole of Color Homer Plessy sought to end segregation for good by demonstrating its adherence to an asinine and arbitrary system of racial classification by occupying a white-only car on a train leaving the city. Although self- and socially-identified as black, Plessy was so light skinned that he had to tell the conductor taking his ticket that indeed he was a black man, he was sitting in the whites-only car, and he wasn't moving. Rather than using his light skin as a badge to "pass" for white as would have been typical for a man of his wealth, education and color, Plessy chose to side with his black identity, in the hopes of ending intuitions of segregation for good.

This protest backfired. Plessy was arrested, and his subsequent court case attempting to strike down segregation merely upheld it. The Supreme Court decided that segregated facilities – whether they be schools, bathrooms, drinking fountains or train cars – did not impede American civil liberties, so long as there were equal facilities for white and black. "Equal" quickly became a farce, ushering in a formal, legalized form of discrimination and racial inequality. This more

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Homer A. Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1892).

codified, regular, and ubiquitous system of segregation than the informal slights seen prior became known as a system of “Jim Crow”<sup>41</sup> laws, a name almost as demeaning as the restrictions themselves. The ideological acceptability of “separate but equal” as a dominant narrative in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ensured the full realization of black political and social disenfranchisement, including eroding the quality and equity of schools for black students. A culture of fear sustained this system through the 1940s, until organized legal challenges to this system of inequality and segregation began.

On May 17, 1954, arguably the most influential Supreme Court decision in American history was handed down.<sup>42</sup> The unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*<sup>43</sup> effectively struck down the “separate but equal” system of education, requiring the conversation on integration to begin in every corner of the United States.<sup>44</sup> The initial reaction to *Brown* in New Orleans was one of extreme resistance. Immediately following the decision, a state Constitutional amendment was adopted requiring segregation in the public schools. But eventually, all legal appeals had been exhausted, and integration became inevitable. When this day arrived, on the shoulders of four elementary school girls hand-picked to integrate the public schools, chaos unparalleled elsewhere in the United States broke out. Federal marshals were

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<sup>41</sup> “Jim Crow” references black minstrel shows of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where black performers would wear makeup to distinguish “negro” features such as jet-black skin and a wide, grinning mouth, while performing acts of buffoonery for the amusement if not enlightenment of white patrons.

<sup>42</sup> Waldo E. Martin, “Shades of *Brown*: black freedom, white supremacy and the law,” in *The American Civil Rights Movement: readings and Interpretations*, ed. Raymond d’Angelo (New York: McGraw/Dushkin, 2001). It is difficult to overstate the significance of a decision which affects so universally the social structure of the United States. This decision reached far beyond the formally segregated schools of the South to affect every child and adult caregiver in the United States. After a generation, there wasn’t a person in the United States who was not in some way directly affected by this unanimous decision. There are few if any other decisions that have had such far-reaching importance.

<sup>43</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*; 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>44</sup> *Brown* transitioned school integration from a minority perspective and a sidebar conversation occurring in a handful of school districts across the country and instead made it a topic of urgent importance, with national pressure to resolve.

required to escort the girls to school past angry white mobs. This violence would continue, unabated, for at least a month.

Robert Crain provides a broad national survey of integration in *The Politics of School Desegregation*.<sup>45</sup> This study compares eight Northern cities with seven Southern cities, including New Orleans, to discover where racial tensions existed, didn't exist, and why. Crain focuses on New Orleans because of the extreme "crisis" of desegregation here, a "total breakdown" not seen in the 14 other examples that he uses. Crain examines in particular the failure of the educated, white New Orleans elite from stepping in to facilitate the desegregation effort, believing that if they had played a stronger role, the transition could have occurred much more smoothly.

Morton Inger, Crain's research partner, determined that the case of New Orleans warranted special consideration and continued this scholarship with his own publication: *Politics and Reality in an American City*.<sup>46</sup> This short book is a New Orleans-focused reading of Crain, examining "why one city, which seemingly was ready to be a leader in racial matters, became instead a center of resistance."<sup>47</sup> Inger agrees with Crain that the lack of elite intervention in the issue of school desegregation ultimately led to its failure, concluding that a lack of real power among those who were being desegregated, and an over-emphasis on national politics rather than placating the realities of the situation were the ultimate sources of failure.

### **Meanwhile, in the Village...**

Nearby, and yet a world away, was Fazendeville. This unincorporated town located about a mile east of New Orleans in the neighboring Parish of St. Bernard was called by its residents

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<sup>45</sup> Robert L. Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1968).

<sup>46</sup> Morton Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City: the New Orleans school crisis of 1960* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1969).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 5.

simply “the Village.” It was established in the late 1860s by former slaves,<sup>48</sup> on land parceled out and sold off by free man of color and New Orleans businessman Jean-Pierre Fazende. The newly founded community developed in part to escape the escalating race tensions of the city, but also more simply for its founders to seek an agrarian ideal of a family, a home, and land to work.

The town was settled onto hallowed ground: on Chalmette Battlefield, site of the Battle of New Orleans, the final major battle in the War of 1812, and the first major American military victory in the nation’s then short history. Although prominently sandwiched between an unfinished memorial obelisk and a stately National Cemetery, little attention was paid to the battlefield itself, and less to the people who called it home. Only a few dozen houses dotted Fazende’s Lane, nurturing a small but close-knit population.

At the outskirts of town, Fazendeville gathered little interest from the white population. And so it thrived, similar in ways to New Orleans, similar in ways to other rural and predominantly black communities, and yet entirely unique. The Fazendeville School, like many small, rural Southern schools, was located in a one-room multipurpose hall. It had one teacher, and served every student of the community from first through eighth grade. Although it lacked funding, struggled to find qualified teachers, and offered an uncomfortable classroom environment, it was largely ignored by outsiders and so largely autonomous. The residents wanted equality. They wanted Plessy to live up to its promises. But in the absence of equal, the residents accepted the small grace of separate.

### **Fazendeville as a Case Study**

The case study of Fazendeville further disrupts the dominant narrative of integration in the South, and even challenges the counternarrative of New Orleans. In a time of halting

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<sup>48</sup> The first church in Fazendeville was established in 1867.

experiments with school integration, Fazendeville was established by free people of color with a desire to self-segregate. The residents created for themselves a quiet haven. Resident Lucy Boyer Thomas reflected on the land surrounding the Village, “It used to be a big land, nothing but property with a whole lot of stuff on it, just like paradise. In the fields, you had all kinds of fruit. You had pears, when it was pear time... figs when it was fig time. You always had blackberries. You made blackberry jam and juice and stuff. Then you had all kinds of peaches when it was peach time.”<sup>49</sup> But this paradise and segregated haven was lost in the 1960s at precisely the peak of anti-integration sentiment. It was torn down by the white-controlled government, perhaps not because of the race of its inhabitants, but certainly not blind to that fact.

In many ways, Fazendeville exists as a microcosm of New Orleans: it is close in proximity as seen in Figure 1.3, and shares the same cultural orientation, shared history, and social institutions. But the result of its segregation cast it onto an entirely different historical trajectory. By further complicating the narrative, Fazendeville proves there is no single anti-narrative, that infinite variations from the dominant story exist. Fazendeville provides yet another, divergent example of the role of race in integration, keeping race squarely at the center of its narrative.

Although Fazendeville’s early history was as a peacefully segregated and autonomous black community, with its historically prominent location this quiet couldn’t last long. For the first 70 years of its existence, this sleepy town garnered little interest from the government at any level, but in 1939 the National Park Service began acquiring the land surrounding Fazendeville to preserve the battlefield as a National Monument. This put increasing pressure on the residents to relocate so the battlefield could be restored to its 1815 appearance. In the 1950s and 1960s as

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<sup>49</sup> Lucy Boyer Thomas, interviewed by Nilima Mwendo, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, November 21, 2003.

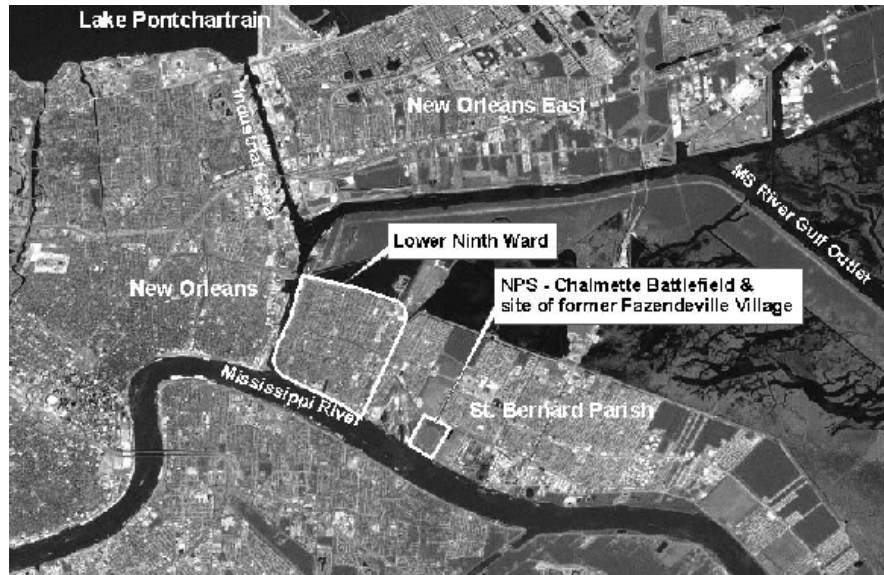


Figure 1.3: Map of Fazendeville in relation to Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes<sup>50</sup>

these negotiations intensified, Blacks were very much second-class citizens: restricted from voting, holding public office, using public facilities, even marrying a white person.<sup>51</sup> Because the existence of Fazendeville ran counter to the dominant narrative and the prerogatives of the Whites in power, it was seen as secondary and ultimately disposable.<sup>52</sup>

By 1962, with the sesquicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans quickly approaching,<sup>53</sup> community pressure to restore the battlefield reached a fever pitch. This included not only razing Fazendeville, but also reconstructing lost battlefield features such as the rampart wall built by Andrew Jackson's troops in 1814, redigging the historic Rodriguez Canal, and planting a screen

<sup>50</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

<sup>51</sup> These restrictions were typically *de facto* rather than *de jure*, yet still widespread voting and political disenfranchisement and erosion of civil rights existed.

<sup>52</sup> I do not argue that Fazendeville was torn down simply because the residents were black and the white government could do so with few repercussions, but I do argue that the fact the community was black was significant in making the decision to acquire the land and tear down buildings in the first place. Would the Village have been relocated if it wasn't on significant land, simply because the government had the power? Unlikely. If it was a white village, would the same scenario have played out as it did? Impossible to know, but I argue it wouldn't have.

<sup>53</sup> Congress established the "sesquicentennial commission for the celebration of the Battle of New Orleans" on October 9 1962, giving the Secretary of the Interior the authority "to acquire certain property within Chalmette National Historical Park" in anticipation for the January 1965 anniversary. 76 Stat. 755.



of trees to shield the battlefield from nearby highway 46.<sup>54</sup> Kaiser Aluminum donated 66 acres of battlefield to the National Park Service in 1963, placing even more pressure on Fazendeville to sell, as the last remaining private owners of land between the cemetery and the monument.<sup>55</sup>

Figure 1.4 illustrates Fazendeville's central placement.

Fazendeville had been in slow decline for a generation, with community members leaving the Village for the nearby Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, and its draw of sewage, sidewalks, public water and secondary public schools, all of which Fazendeville lacked.<sup>56</sup> But the decision to leave was hardly unanimous, with many residents ultimately forced out under the auspices of eminent domain. Most of the houses, churches, grocery stores, pecan trees, and the

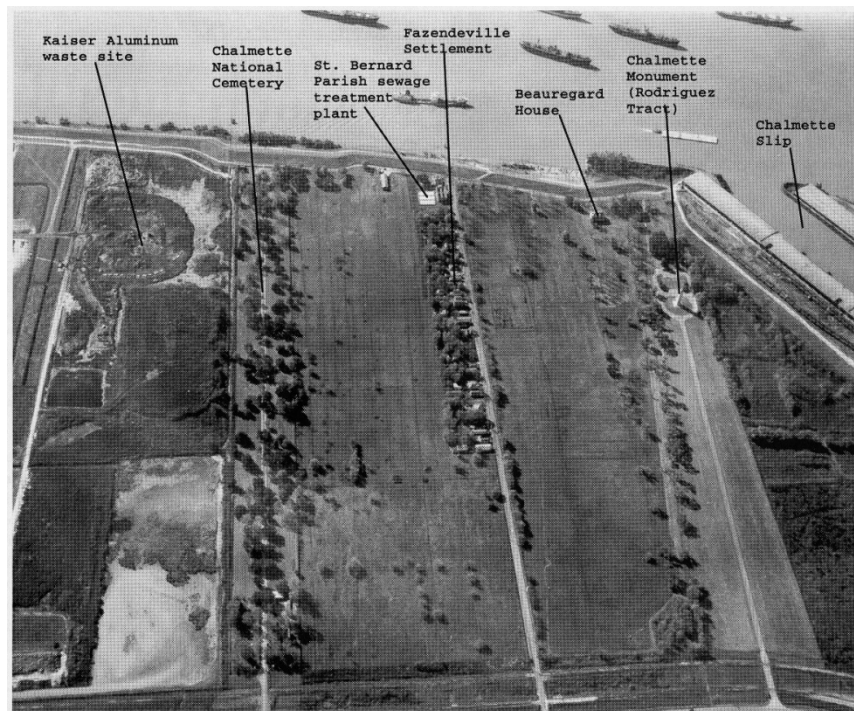


Figure 1.4: Photograph showing Fazendeville in relation to Chalmette Battlefield, National Cemetery, and Kaiser Aluminum Plant, undated<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Jerome A. Greene, "Historic Resource Study: Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve," *United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service*, 1985, 62.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Juliette Landphair, "Sewerage, Sidewalks and Schools: the New Orleans Ninth Ward and public school desegregation," *Louisiana History* 40, 1(1999): 35-62.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

school were razed by the end of 1964 and the battlefield topography reconstructed. On the morning of January 8, 1965, the sun rose on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans on a plain which would have been vaguely familiar to an 1815 soldier, but completely unrecognizable to a Fazendeville resident from the year prior.<sup>58</sup>

Today, even among-lifelong residents of St. Bernard Parish, and the nearby Ninth Ward, mentions of Fazendeville are often greeted with blank stares. The battlefield is currently preserved as the Chalmette Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, yet this story is largely untold. One lonely informational sign tells the story of Fazendeville to curious park-goers, but off the main visitation path, and not incorporated into the primary educational message of the site, most visitors will never know Fazendeville. Although Chalmette Battlefield is only six miles from downtown New Orleans, it is rarely visited by New Orleans residents. Some of this can be attributed to logistics – poorer urban schools without access to busses, poorer urban communities without the means to own cars, and no public transportation available makes getting there difficult. Yet some of it can only be explained by ideology.

The story the park tells is largely a white man's history: nostalgia of a time of great prosperity, and the role that New Orleans played in securing American independence. When the park was first established in 1939, it was dedicated "to the memory of the soldiers who fell in the Battle of New Orleans," perhaps not surprisingly with no mention of the civilian contributions to the battle or to the many layers of history which would come after the "Glorious Eighth."<sup>59</sup> But even the most recent park planning documents neglect this story, declaring the purpose of the site "to honor and commemorate those who fought and died to preserve American independence at

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<sup>58</sup> Almost no physical features of the battlefield existed into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those visible today were reconstructed surrounding the sesquicentennial to reclaim the 1815 historical landscape, actively at the expense of Fazendeville.

<sup>59</sup> "An Act to provide for the establishment of the Chalmette National Historical Park in the State of Louisiana, and for other purposes, approved August 10, 1939," 53 Stat. 1342. "The Glorious Eighth" is how the Battle of New Orleans, in connection to celebrations of it, was typically referred throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

the Battle of New Orleans,” with its significance attributed to “the archaeological and cultural landscape remnants of one of the most significant battlefields of the War of 1812.”<sup>60</sup>

Fazendeville is regarded as ahistorical: an interesting fact about the battlefield, but secondary to a narrative that has been isolated as dominant and more significant. According to this understanding, Fazendeville is anachronistic.<sup>61</sup> This approach to history, emphasizing an “us” and a “them” is all too common in scholarship instead of thinking of the many layers of identity and history that build upon each other. According to Molly Andrews, the establishment of boundaries is a product of “our dominant theoretical framework,” encouraged by “our socialization [which] leads us to be deeply invested in the meanings attached to these boundaries, and we come to believe in the moral superiority of the position from which we emanate.”<sup>62</sup> As Fazendeville illustrates, constructions of dominant narratives are tied to dominant social groups, which in southeast Louisiana, is inseparable from race.

Fazendeville as a case study directly challenges these boundaries that Andrews establishes, drafting yet another counternarrative and forcing confrontation with the question: whose history has value? The inclusion of this case study, as through the broader redrafting of the dominant narrative “tacitly question[s] the legitimate authority of macrolevel history,” a byproduct of narrative inquiry.<sup>63</sup> The story of Fazendeville – its creation, its murder, and its ghost – pose yet another challenge to the dominant narrative of race and integration. In the 1960s

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<sup>60</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Services, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Chalmette Unit. *General Management Plan Amendment/ Development Concept/ Environmental Assessment*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> There have been attempts in recent years to expand the story of the battlefield to demonstrate better diversity, such as through a youth outreach program that educates a small number of local white, black, and Choctaw American Indian students the contributions of people from these ethnicities historically at the battle. However, these efforts reach only a select few visitors, are unappreciated by the vast majority of park visitors, and still fail to address any part of the site’s history post-1815.

<sup>62</sup> Molly Andrews, “Exploring Cross-Cultural Boundaries,” in *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: mapping a methodology*, ed. D. Jean Clandinin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 507.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Morgan-Fleming, Sandra Riegle and Wesley Fryer, “Narrative Inquiry in Archival Work,” in *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: mapping a methodology*, ed. D. Jean Clandinin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 86.

when Fazendeville was torn down, the choice to privilege the War of 1812 story over the Village's existence was not the simplest choice – after all, it required lawyers, money, bulldozers, and backhoes to pull down Fazendeville and reconstruct the Battle of New Orleans landscape features.<sup>64</sup> Yet it was the ideologically obvious one, as it preserved the dominant and accepted narrative. At the center of that decision, and broadly the decision privileging one tradition, one narrative over another, is race.<sup>65</sup>

## Methodology

This study incorporates qualitative and quantitative data from archival sources to explore and challenge an historical narrative on integration. Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen describe historical research as “the process of systematically examining past events or combinations of events to arrive at an account of what has happened in the past.”<sup>66</sup> However, in addition to this chronologicalization, I also will explore the role of race in integration from the 1870s to the present by interpreting, challenging and theorizing the same archival sources.

The nature of archival research utilized in this study is subjective and open to interpretation. Archives are rarely complete, especially when examining marginalized stories, calling upon the researcher to ask “Whose story is it? Who authored this tale? Whose voices are included? Whose voices were silenced? As our attention is called to one facet of an event, what

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<sup>64</sup> Kevin Risk, “Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery Cultural Landscape Report,” *Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources Stewardship Division, Southeast Region* (1999), 23. As late as 1957, it was unclear where exactly the rampart and canal would have been. Archaeological surveys and reconstruction projects were completed in the late 1950s and early 1960s using funding from “Mission 66,” a widespread campaign of structural improvements of National Park Service sites around the United States in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the service in 1966.

<sup>65</sup> Another similar example of race being central to decision-making in public improvement projects is the placement of the Interstate-10 overpass in the 1960s. The overpass was engineered to cut along Claiborne Avenue, bifurcating well-established black neighborhoods such as the Tremé, Seventh Ward and Ninth Ward while bypassing more affluent neighborhoods.

<sup>66</sup> Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen, *Educational Research: quantitative and qualitative approaches* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2006).

aspects are nudged into shadow?”<sup>67</sup> Through this research, I hope to establish an authentic dialogue between the present and the past, exploring an historical narrative to facilitate understanding as well as to frame and give context to current challenges of race and integration. This interpretive element is critical to historical scholarship according to Johnson and Christensen, who argue that historical writing is “much more than retelling of past facts. Instead it is a flowing, fluid, dynamic account of past events that attempts to recapture the complex nuances, individual personalities, and ideas that influenced the events being investigated.”<sup>68</sup> The purpose, therefore, of historical research is not simply to gain an understanding of the past, but to provide “a sense of where we have come from and how we have become what we are.”<sup>69</sup>

As Petra Hendry writes, curriculum and education have a tendency to be rendered “ahistorical,” conceptualized as “neutral, universal (timeless), apolitical, and consequently a technical endeavor.”<sup>70</sup> Yet any quick review of news stories today debating the role of federal legislation in classrooms, core curricula, or charter schools, reveals that education is deeply political and inextricably tied to the society from which it emerges. Historical scholarship is subject to the same influences, although they are not always acknowledged. It is often taken for granted that the latest research is somehow more valid, more accurate, and more representative of what actually happened than that which came before. It is assumed that by using the latest technologies in document analysis, archaeology or artifact conservation, our understanding and imaging of an historical moment is brought closer to “The Truth.” Yet this “Truth” proves to be an ever-elusive and constantly morphing objective.

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<sup>67</sup> Fleming et al., “Narrative Inquiry in Archival Work,” 82.

<sup>68</sup> Burke and Johnson, *Educational Research: quantitative and qualitative approaches*, 342.

<sup>69</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: reflections on the uses of history* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Petra Munro Hendry, preface to *Engendering Curriculum History*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), x.

Hendry writes about this progression away from “an archaic past” as a deeply gendered understanding of what constitutes value in scholarship.<sup>71</sup> Distilling historical research and writing into a binary and linear process of uncovering increasingly greater truths is dangerously short-sighted. In this research, I assume a posture of reflexivity in historical thinking. I challenge the belief that the newest, deepest, most carefully drawn out and most ostensibly balanced research is the best, arguing that this blind faith neglects the powerful role that our own understandings, biases, prejudices, limitations, agendas, and preoccupations play not only in what we study, but how we understand and interpret it. This appreciation for the role of interpreting history places special emphasis on the role of the historian and the experience she brings to research. Morgan-Fleming et al. equate this exploration to “the story of the elephant in the dark, in which blindfolded individuals touching different parts of the elephant come to very different conclusions about the animal in the room with them.”<sup>72</sup> To write history is to discover. In many ways, we say less about the subject of our study than we do about ourselves.

This study is therefore deeply autoethnographic. It represents my own struggle to better comprehend the role of race in integration that has been of interest to me for nearly a decade. I have worked both in classroom and in non-classroom education environments in the diverse and starkly different cities of New York and New Orleans. A specific lens of experience I engage is informal education via the National Park Service. Although for many this is an odd choice, for me it is as essential as the subject of study itself. I left the classroom in 2008 and have been working with NPS ever since, currently at the French Quarter/ Chalmette Battlefield Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in New Orleans. The experience of working in two very different areas of the country has encouraged me to think about the role of race in different

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<sup>71</sup> Hendry, *Engendering Curriculum History*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan-Fleming et. al, “Narrative Inquiry in Archival Work,” 83.

integration scenarios. I also through my professional work became familiar with Fazendeville.

As a researcher, a scholar, an educator, and a steward of the battlefield that holds its ruins, I believe that I have a personal, academic, and professional obligation to make this story known.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout this research, I will strive to present a picture which is as scholarly and balanced as possible. But in framing this research as autoethnography, I intend to explore my biases and my experiences engaging with race and integration as well. This personal exploration is not necessarily at odds with traditional, dispassionate scholarship according to Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., who argues that a postmodern historical posture questions “the received viewpoint grounding the social sciences: an ideal scientific positivism and its corollary, the strict separation of objectivity and subjectivity.”<sup>74</sup> Being aware of my positionality helps rather than hinders my critical awareness.<sup>75</sup> My research is unapologetically a part of who I am: it explores the same fascinations, is limited by the same understandings, and is driven by the same passions.

## Processes

This research seeks to ask four primary questions:

- 1) What is the narrative of school integration in New Orleans and how does it differ from the dominant narrative of integration?
- 2) How does focusing on the black community of Fazendeville further challenge the dominant narratives of school integration?
- 3) What role does race play in the construction of these counternarratives of school integration?

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<sup>73</sup> To echo footnote 11 from this section, this research reflects my own personal opinions, and is a research project that I undertook independent of my professional role as a park ranger at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

<sup>74</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: history as text and discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>75</sup> D. Soyini Madison acknowledges the vital role of positionality “because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects.” D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: method, ethics, and performance* (Thousand Oaks, Cali.: Sage, 2005), 7.

- 4) How do considering the property value of whiteness and challenging traditional understandings of race help to theorize race in the narrative (and counternarrative) of integration in New Orleans?

In order to answer these questions and challenge the dominant historical narrative on race and integration, I conducted extensive research of both historical and contemporary archival sources, as well as theorized the role of race in these historical narratives. I examined the narrative of race and integration in New Orleans from Reconstruction to the present, consulting many different archives, including the Amistad Research Center and Louisiana Research Center at Tulane University, the Williams Research Center at the Historic New Orleans Collection, the Lower Mississippi Valley Collection of Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University, the University of New Orleans' collections held at the Earl K. Long Library, the archives of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve<sup>76</sup> and municipal records of Orleans Parish held at the New Orleans Public Library.

Combing through archives can be dusty and tedious work, sifting through file upon file of manuscripts and microfilms, searching for a passing reference to the historical moment and topic of study. Paper archives are in a constant battle against time, and are more susceptible to fading and destruction than other media such as microfilmed archives or audio/visual archives. There is a historical bias that favors the printed over the written, the vellum over the paper, and the meticulously digitally archived over the humble shoebox in an attic.<sup>77</sup> Newer digital archival

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<sup>76</sup> I am indebted to park curator Kathy Lang for her assistance in helping me sift through park records, many of which are not fully catalogued.

<sup>77</sup> Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1964). In this important media criticism text, McLuhan argues that "the media is the message," or that the message transmitted has as much to do with the information content as it does the medium through which it is translated. I am indebted to Dr. Mitchell Stephens of New York University, my undergraduate thesis advisor, who helped shape and refine my understanding of this topic.



technologies are easier to use and are more readily accessible than archives that only exist in tangible form, privileging these records that have been preserved digitally even further.<sup>78</sup>

Archives of personal papers can be difficult to make use of, for they are rarely complete records of a person's experiences, are not necessarily accurate or informed by a larger society, and elaborate longhand can be difficult to decipher. However, despite these challenges, I was able to make use of several collections of personal papers especially from the Reconstruction era, such as the Benedict family papers (Picture in Figure 1.5) and the William O. Rogers papers from the Louisiana Research Center at Tulane.

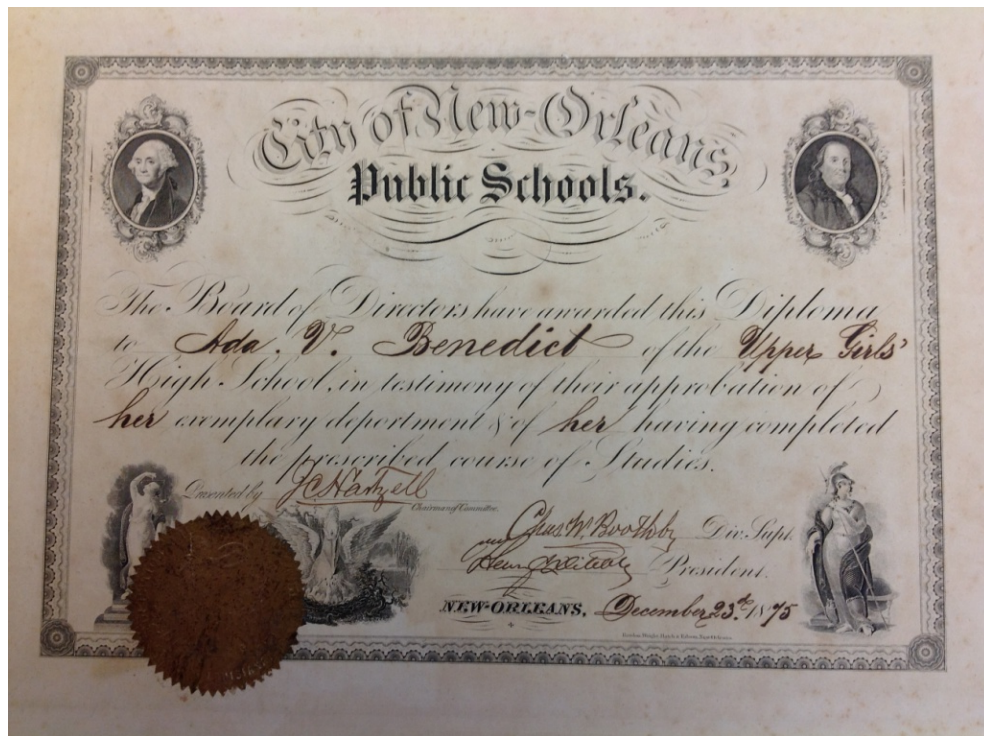


Figure 1.5: Diploma of Ada V. Benedict from Benedict Family Papers<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Morgan-Fleming et al., "Narrative Inquiry in Archival Work," 88. Advantages of digital archives over traditional microfilmed archives include their easy accessibility, their ability to be constantly and conveniently referred back to at any hour of the day from anywhere in the world and often their search function. Although the technology of digital archives is readily available, the personnel to do the archival work are not. Documents are preserved digitally first in order of importance, and then based on funding and staff availability. This further privileges dominant narratives, not only preserving them, but also making them easier to use in research. Marginalized stories are further marginalized, making the bias of the medium even more dramatic.

<sup>79</sup> Benedict Family Papers; Louisiana Research Collection; Tulane University; New Orleans, La.

I found printed newspapers to be particularly useful resources as they were not limited by the same challenges of readability. I consulted New Orleans newspapers such as the *Times-Picayune*, the *Times*, the *Daily Picayune*, the *City Item*, the *New-Orleans Times* and the *Weekly Louisianan* through digital databases. I also consulted microfilmed copies of the *St. Bernard Voice* from the special collections of Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University. Full coverage from newspapers is often readily available for the time period this research covers, and this medium provides a clear window into the dominant narratives of the period, helping me to understand what knowledge and events were deemed as newsworthy, shocking, interesting, or otherwise valuable. Especially in the context of newspapers, I find what is not said and not covered to be at times as telling as what is covered. This is not always true of personal papers.<sup>80</sup>

Official reports and archives of documents from federal, state and local government agencies were reliable sources for accounts and evidence of the moments I reconstruct. Proceedings of the Orleans Parish School board during Reconstruction preserved at the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans helped to reveal the tensions surrounding school integration. Archival letters from the Superintendent of Chalmette National Battlefield in the collections of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve allowed me to better understand racial attitudes surrounding Fazendeville in the 1960s and the decision to raze it.

Immaterial archival objects that I consulted, especially in context of the case study of Fazendeville, are oral history interviews. According to D. Soyini Madison, oral histories are the “recounting of a social historical moment reflected in the life of individuals who remember

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<sup>80</sup> Recognizing an omission in personal papers as significant can be a challenge because it requires thorough understanding of the person who wrote the document and what their experiences were. The fact that a person didn’t mention a topic of interest to the researcher may simply be because that particular individual was not aware of it. In the case of newspapers, although omissions can also mean that writers, editors and readers were not aware of certain events or topics, it reflects not a casual ignorance, but cultural preference and dominance.

them.”<sup>81</sup> There are few tangible records remaining of Fazendeville, but there is a trove of oral history interviews collected between 2001 and 2007 by Dr. Joyce Jackson of the Anthropology department at Louisiana State University, in partnership with the National Park Service.<sup>82</sup> The limitations of using oral history interviews from archives rather than conducting one’s own oral history interviews confine the researcher to the curiosity of the interviewer, their topic of study and the questions that they asked. In the case of the Fazendeville oral history interviews, Dr. Jackson’s primary interests in folklore, religious rites, community celebrations and folk medicine diverged from my own, and most of the subjects she interviewed nearly a decade ago now are no longer alive to be interviewed again. Also, the distance of time from the present, and even from 2001 when Dr. Jackson began collecting these interviews, to the establishment of the community, result in oral history only being an available medium documenting the later portion of the Village’s existence.

Oral histories can be difficult to navigate as they are particularly subject to poor memories, the influence of dominant culture on reframing an understanding of a historical narrative, and aspirational re-telling.<sup>83</sup> Especially when the narrative being constructed aims to challenge dominant narratives as this research does, the unintentional biases reflecting the influence of culture and accepted history on the recollections of interview subjects and the decision of what stories are of value and interest become even more pronounced. But as historian

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<sup>81</sup> Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, ethics, and performance*, 26.

<sup>82</sup> These unpublished oral histories were collected as part of an unfinished historical research study on Fazendeville initiated in the 1990s by park anthropologist Allison Peña to better understand a more complete cultural landscape of Chalmette Battlefield. The oral histories and other research materials that make up this study are located in the archives of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, at 419 Decatur St. in New Orleans, Louisiana. I am indebted to Allison for her guidance in helping me navigate through the unpublished oral history collection, and permission to use these materials for this research.

<sup>83</sup> Humans are natural storytellers, and so it is natural in re-telling a story that we exaggerate for effect, or even entirely unconsciously embellish our experiences to come off as more interesting or important to the person we tell the story to. I define “aspirational re-telling” as the entirely subconscious and innocent practice of re-telling a story as someone wants to remember it, not necessarily as it happened. There is great value in assessing how people want to remember the past, yet it makes for difficulty in navigating an unfamiliar chronology and historical landscape.

Gordon Wood argues, “Perhaps there has always been a tension between critical history and memory, between what historians write and what society chooses to remember.”<sup>84</sup> Although oral histories are not as empirically truthful as a photograph, they are critical to preserving marginalized stories such as Fazendeville for whom few other tangible records exist. And although these stories are often neither precise nor stable nor fixed, much understanding of great substance and importance can be revealed in these variations.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to qualitative analysis of primary documents, this research also implements quantitative analysis of both historical and contemporary data from census reports and education statistics and metrics studies. I consult census data from 1860 through 2010, one of few consistently reliable sources of information acknowledging the black community of New Orleans and especially the people of Fazendeville.<sup>86</sup> A data collection sheet from 1940 documenting that Fazendeville community is pictured in Figure 1.6. I consulted two contemporary studies on race and public schools in New Orleans: a 2010 study from the University of Minnesota Law School on race and poverty in New Orleans public schools post-Katrina<sup>87</sup> and a 2012 study from Tulane University addressing similar issues.<sup>88</sup> These have helped me piece together the role of race in integration in New Orleans from Reconstruction up to the present.

The particular instance of archival research in the context of south Louisiana, and especially in the city of New Orleans and in St. Bernard Parish, introduces a unique challenge of

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<sup>84</sup> Wood, *The Purpose of the Past*, 7. In addition to being true on a social level, it is also true on the level of an individual – just as society is influenced by dominant narratives, so are individuals.

<sup>85</sup> Gwyn Prins, “Oral History,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1991), 119.

<sup>86</sup> The individual data sheets from the 1940 census were particularly useful in providing a rich trove of information on the people of Fazendeville, including income, employment, family size and education level for all of the 203 residents of the Village that year.

<sup>87</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Law School, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Tulane University, Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives; *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Tulane University, 2012).



devastating. With digital archives still nascent, and among a people ill-prepared for the complete destruction this massive storm would bring, the fragile archives preserving much of the story I aim to tell did not stand a chance. It might be impossible to know all that was lost. But dead-ends and unanswered questions as a result of archival casualties prove to be all too common.

## **Critical Race Theory**

This research draws on critical race theory analysis to disrupt the dominant narrative on integration. This theorization will primarily explore the evolution of the property value of whiteness and its effect on integration, and will use the counternarratives of New Orleans and Fazendeville to challenge traditional understandings of race, and explore how these fluid racial constructions have influenced integration. “Property value of whiteness” is a concept introduced by Cheryl I. Harris in a 1993 *Harvard Law Review* article. She argues that since “property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination”<sup>91</sup> as a byproduct of slavery, and because whiteness came to mean freedom and blackness enslavement, there is an intrinsic value assigned to whiteness.<sup>92</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV in their essay “Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education,” draw on Harris to argue that in the context of education, students are rewarded for conforming to white norms and possessing white cultural capital is the only way to achieve academic success.<sup>93</sup>

Extending from a plantation economy in the American South and exacerbated by centuries of white social and political dominance as well as black disenfranchisement, whiteness

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<sup>91</sup> Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106/8, 1993: 1716.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 1720.

<sup>93</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV, “Towards a critical Race Theory of Education,” in *Critical Race Theory in Education: all God’s children got a song*, ed. Dixson and Rousseau, 22.

has been established as the culturally preferred.<sup>94</sup> This cultural capital is seen in the maintenance of perceived white social superiority following the collapse of the economy and reconfiguration of society following the Civil War and continuing well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contributing to a mutually debilitating “myth of race” that affirmed a binary racial identity: black or white. Complicit in the establishment of this false dominant narrative is traditional Southern history, which has “long played the role of myth reinforcing racism.”<sup>95</sup> CRT as a primary method of theorizing gives a vocabulary to these challenges that I pose and helps me to question the role of race in constructing narratives on integration. *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement*<sup>96</sup> is a particularly useful edited collection which discuss the major tenets of CRT and the evolution of the field.

Although CRT began its life as a movement of legal and social criticism, it quickly migrated into the sphere of education, where I will keep it situated. The collection of essays *Critical Race Theory in Education: all God’s children got a song*, edited by Adrienne D. Dixon and Celia K. Rousseau<sup>97</sup> take the broadly defined ideas of CRT addressed in Crenshaw and localize them within the field of education. Thandeka K. Chapman<sup>98</sup> focuses on the failure of desegregation efforts as the product of an ongoing lack of social power and enfranchisement among urban African Americans. Gloria Ladson-Billings<sup>99</sup> in the forward and with William F.

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<sup>94</sup> David Brown and Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: from Slavery to civil rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Preface to *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: the development of Afro-Creole culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century*, ed. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>96</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, Kendall Thomas, ed.s, *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement* (New York: the New Press, 1995).

<sup>97</sup> Adrienne D. Dixon and Celia K. Rousseau, *Critical Race Theory in Education: all God’s children got a song* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> Thandeka K. Chapman, “Pedaling Backward: reflections of *Plessy* and *Brown* in Rockford Public Schools’ *de jure* desegregation efforts,” in *Critical Race Theory in Education*, ed. Dixon and Rousseau, 67-88.

<sup>99</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, “They’re Trying to Wash us Away: the adolescence of critical race theory in education,” in Dixon and Rousseau, ed.s, *Critical Race Theory in Education*, v-xiii.

Tate IV in the first chapter,<sup>100</sup> and Dixson and Rousseau<sup>101</sup> in the second chapter all address the ongoing failures in achieving equality and stubborn segregation, centered around race. Together, they argue that years after desegregation efforts in education were supposedly completed, schools still remain segregated and fail to meet the needs of minority students. They call for a drastic reconceptualization of a system of education which acknowledges the central role of race in schools, and most importantly a reconceptualization of a system of training educators to help them understand the role of race in the classroom.

Ladson-Billings echoes these criticisms of a blindness to the role of race in her essential essay “From the achievement gap to the education debt: understanding achievement in U.S. schools,”<sup>102</sup> but takes this criticism a step further in her book *The Dream-Keepers: successful teachers of African American Children*.<sup>103</sup> Here, she not only discusses the ongoing challenges posed by race and segregation in contemporary public schools through ethnographic classroom observations, she implements autoethnographic counternarratives to propose a curriculum of cultural relevancy that is focused on the lived and cultural experience of students.<sup>104</sup> Ladson-Billings remains an inspiration for me personally, and her work significantly informs my scholarship, as well as my choice to frame this research autoethnographically.

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<sup>100</sup> Ladson-Billings and Tate IV, “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,” 11-30.

<sup>101</sup> Adrienne D. Dixson and Celia K. Rousseau, “And We Are Still Not Saved: critical race theory in education ten years later,” in *Critical Race Theory in Education: all God’s children got a song*, edited by Dixson and Rousseau, 31-54.

<sup>102</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, “From the achievement gap to the education debt: understanding achievement in U.S. schools,” *Educational Researcher* 35,7 (2006): 3-12.

<sup>103</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dream-Keepers: successful teachers of African American children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

<sup>104</sup> Teaching with a curriculum of cultural relevancy focuses on validating and affirming individual diversion from an accepted standard and celebrates the unique experience of children whose experience and worldview are shaped by different cultural orientations than those of dominant mentalities shaping modern classrooms. Although culturally relevant pedagogy originated as a method of engaging black communities unable to access the cultural capital of a classroom steeped in middle-class white traditions and values, it can be used universally to shape teaching techniques and curriculum based on the specific needs of localized populations. For example, in a culturally relevant classroom, a poetry lesson might focus on hip-hop cadence as a way of understanding iambic pentameter, or country music lyrics to learn about rhyming technique – if either of these styles are popular and relevant to a given population of students.



## Conclusion

New Orleans is a city with a unique culture and tradition that sets it apart not only from its southern neighbors, but from every other city in the world. Perhaps it is natural that its narrative on race, education and integration would be worlds apart as well. Unlike in many southern cities, the issue of school integration was not introduced as a conversation topic in 1954, it was a conversation that had already been taking place for generations, starting as early as Reconstruction.<sup>105</sup> But this narrative has not been a simple and straightforward one. The integration of schools in New Orleans has proven to be complicated and cyclical, with repeating patterns of successes and failures. This narrative, as well as of the further queering<sup>106</sup> case study of Fazendeville challenge what we think we know about the narrative of integration and the assumptions we make about the role of race in this progression.

The public schools in New Orleans experimented with integration in the 1870s at the height of Reconstruction, but this attempt was ultimately a failure. Firmly rejected with the decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>107</sup> in 1896 legitimizing and legalizing segregation, the efforts to integrate lay dormant. Then, nearly a century after the first integration attempt stalled, in the midst of the modern Civil Rights movement, the schools would reinitiate the conversation based on pressure from the black community and the Supreme Court, attempting to bridge the differences of race through integration. Three generations have followed, and somehow we are still struggling with the same questions.

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<sup>105</sup> In some cases, earlier, although for the most part serious efforts to integrate schools (public, private or parochial) didn't begin until Reconstruction. Although there were schooling options for both free and enslaved black New Orleans children prior to the Civil War, they were almost exclusively segregated, as was still customary at the time.

<sup>106</sup> Queer theory is not a lens of analysis which I full engage in this research, but I choose this word choice consciously. I suggest there is a kinship between queer theory and critical race theory; both seek to challenge the role that fundamental biological identifiers (sex, skin color) have played in constructing complex social and cultural identities (gender, race). As queer theory seeks to challenge traditional understandings of gender, so critical race theory and this research seeks to challenge traditional understandings of race: queering, challenging, disrupting, a metanarrative.

<sup>107</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

And yet, we have no solution. The black population of New Orleans is largely concentrated in the urban city center, resulting in a majority black population in the city itself, and majority white populations in the surrounding and growing suburbs. Connected to the racial divide is great wealth inequity, with neighborhoods and their schools segregated by custom, practice, and price tag, even if no longer by law. White students are sent to more highly-performing schools; black students are concentrated in the impoverished and underperforming ones. It is a devastating and persistent cycle of misunderstanding, disadvantage, and inequality.

Like the life of any person, the narrative of integration in New Orleans is nuanced, complicated, contradictory, and eminently flawed; the product of a system of education using race to discriminate and divide rather than enrich and inform. And so, this requiem will chronicle the life of the integrated schools of New Orleans and celebrate their expiration and passing into a phase of greater, if still only theoretical perfection. A requiem in the Catholic tradition is comprised of distinct liturgical sections that progress a funeral mass from welcoming a congregation of mourners and giving thanks to God, through contemplating the mysteries of His work and the tribulations and transgressions of men, to asking for forgiveness for humanly shortcomings and praying for the life of the deceased, and finally celebrating the unity of man with God in a more perfect afterlife free of the pain and struggle of life on Earth.

Each section of this research takes its title from a section of a traditional requiem: *introit*, *kyrie eleison*, *cum sanctis tuis*, *dona eis requiem*, *in paradisium*. The first section of this research, *Introit* (entrance), establishes the major themes and concepts that will be explored. I pose my research questions, and ask the reader to contemplate the dominant narrative of race and integration, and ponder what space exists for that assumption to be challenged. I offer the possibility that greater truths and possibilities exist, that will be further explored. The second

section, *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy), begins this exploration by examining integration during Reconstruction. This ultimately failed attempt demonstrates the imperfection of attempts to integrate, and suggests that this failure is not the last time that the schools of New Orleans would be led astray from a path of righteous equality. The third section, *Cum sanctis tuis* (surrounded by saints), continues the exploration of the failures of integration by looking at the Civil Rights era, when integration became a national topic. In this period, with ample support from the federal government (in place of saints), it seemed all but certain that this protection and enforcement would usher in a system of integration for good, yet this too was ultimately a failure. The fourth section, *Dona eis requiem* (give them rest) brings the narrative up to the present moment, and examines the continued failure of the public schools of New Orleans to create integrated schools. It reflects frustration with a broken system much as one might experience frustration and fear at the point of death, and suggests that as this narrative has continuously failed to create integrated schools, then perhaps another conceptualization and an alternate attempt is necessary. Finally, the fifth section, *In paradisum* (in paradise), concludes this exploration of race and integration and recommends a refocused effort celebrating rather than circumventing the role of race in integration as a pathway to escape a continued cycle of inequality and segregation.

Each chapter of this research, in keeping with the theme of a requiem, also has two “psalms” and two “readings” such as may be featured in a funeral mass. The “psalms” consist of short sections for spiritual hymns and contemporary primary source quotations and citations. The “readings” are narrative sections of my own creation dramatizing a vignette of the period of study of each chapter for both New Orleans and Fazendevill.e Like their purpose in a mass, these

“psalms” and “readings” function to allow pause and require reflection on how these parables apply to and enrich the experience of the present.

Using a requiem as an analogy for this exploration frames my argument that only when the cyclical narrative of oppression is broken can a greater and more perfect existence of integration be realized. Although today schools are segregated, there is a bright future. By looking to the historical narrative, questioning how New Orleans fits into it, and considering the role of race in integration, this city has the possibility to develop a reframed narrative on education with race consciously at its center. Like a requiem, this narrative is not hopeless, indeed it is optimistic and confident in the future. A greater truth is possible, given the long history of constant reconfigurations of integrated schools and a tradition of patient and loving rebuilding. But first, we must consider the historical narrative, and let it guide where the path lies ahead.

## II. Kyrie eleison

Oh Lord, have mercy,  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy on me.<sup>1</sup>

All Children of this State between the ages of six (6) and twenty-one (21) shall be admitted to the public schools or other institutions of learning sustained or established by the State in common without distinction of race, color, or previous condition. There shall be no separate schools or institutions of learning established exclusively for any race by the State of Louisiana.<sup>2</sup>

### It was an Ordinary Day in New Orleans...

The city was still reeling from an uprising of white supremacists exactly three months prior. The “White League” strove to overthrow the Northern-influenced government,<sup>3</sup> asserting to other Whites through bloody riot that “you are, of right ought to be and mean to be free.”<sup>4</sup> In chaos, newspapers around the country named this a second Civil War,<sup>5</sup> sure to be the end of the peace, prosperity, and relative harmony that New Orleans had been enjoying. State education superintendent Thomas W. Conway sought to quell the rumors, publishing an open letter in the Washington National Republican stating, “all that is wanted in the matter of civil rights is to let the foes of the measure simply understand that we mean it. Do this, and as in the case of the enemies of free schools in Louisiana, they will be quiet.”<sup>6</sup> This warning would not be heeded.

Carrying out the integration orders, on the morning of December 14, 1874, ten black students headed to Boy’s Central High School to attend classes. They met a mob of angry white students at the gate, determined to keep the school white-only, and to beat back the black

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<sup>1</sup> This traditional spiritual sung by slaves in the American South is derived from classic Latin mass hymns dating from at least the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> L.A. Const., title VII, art. 135.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Omer Landry, *The Battle of Liberty Place: the overthrow of carpetbag rule in New Orleans – September 14, 1874* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1955), 59.

<sup>4</sup> “The Louisiana Revolution,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly IV* (1924), 596.

<sup>5</sup> “The Louisiana Revolution,” *The New-Orleans Times*, 19 September 1874, reprinted from the St. Louis Globe; “Louisiana Coup d’Etat,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 20 September 1874.

<sup>6</sup> Harlan, “Desegregation in New Orleans public schools during Reconstruction,” 664.

students.<sup>7</sup> After the success at Boys' Central, the riled-up crowd marched to the prestigiously lily-white Upper Girls' High School on a quest for racial cleansing to protect the perceived innocence of the white females therein from the taint of integration.<sup>8</sup> The privileged girls of this gilded cage took pride in being "gentle, delicate and refined – not bold, forward, masculine."<sup>9</sup> Preserving this luster, even these innocents eagerly joined in the fray as it quickly dissolved into a violent mob, attacking New Orleans school superintendent Charles W. Boothby as he arrived to calm the scene.<sup>10</sup> The riot escalated, spread throughout the city, and lasted for days as white mobs went into schools, terrorizing black students who had been peacefully attending the integrated schools for years. Only after many smashed windows and the death of two black citizens was the chaotic, if short-lived, violence called to a halt.<sup>11</sup>

### **Integration as an Interlude**

This requiem starts off promising: successful integration began in New Orleans in the 1860s. But before long, it dissolved under pressure from dominant white influence, continuing into a downward cycle and dirge of eroding rights and opportunities all too familiar to the dominant narrative on integration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, understanding the brief period of integration that thrived during Reconstruction is critical to contextualizing over a century of political, cultural, and social upheaval that would follow, and understanding how significantly

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<sup>7</sup> "Youthful knights, an army of school boys on the war path – they take up the lance against mixed schools," *The New-Orleans Times*, 17 December 1874; "The Republican and 'mixed schools,'" *The Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans), 19 December 1874.

<sup>8</sup> Harlan, "Desegregation in New Orleans public schools during Reconstruction," 671.

<sup>9</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 64.

<sup>10</sup> "Forcible Reasoning: school superintendent Boothby meets with a severe setback, likewise a violent assault at the Upper Girls' High School – lively scenes," *The New-Orleans Times*, 16 December 1874. The article described Boothby was "met by a body of twenty-five or thirty young men, who accused him of *Having Insulted the Pupils*, and at the same time Mr. Boothby was rather roughly handled, receiving a thorough shaking and a blow or two in the face."

<sup>11</sup> DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 81.

the counternarrative of school integration in New Orleans diverges from the dominant Southern narrative. As soon as Louisiana was reconciled to the Union, the attempt to ensure equality formally began. Before there was *Brown*<sup>12</sup>, before the Supreme Court stepped in as surrogate collective conscious for an American people, the legislature of Louisiana envisioned a future where there was no separate, only equal.

There was already a well-established black tradition of education, with black citizens occupying jobs requiring a formal education, but not a tradition reserved for the elite. A Catholic system of education provided schooling options both for poor free and even enslaved children on a limited basis.<sup>13</sup> Publicly funded schools for children of color became a reality in 1850 upon the death of philanthropist John McDonogh, and his subsequent bequeathment of \$700,000 calling for the development of public schools “wherein the poor, (and the poor only) of both sexes and all classes and castes of color, shall have admittance, free of expense.”<sup>14</sup> The push to assert equality through integrated schools was a position far less extreme than it was in other parts of the United States. And so in 1867 the democratically elected representatives of Louisiana began asking “the public school question” of how to provide equal access to education not as it had always been, segregated by race, experimenting with the radical notion of integrated schools.

Using integration as a method of social unification was not without precedent in New Orleans. As soon as the American government took control following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Governor William C.C. Claiborne pushed to enroll “the children of native Louisiana and the Native Americans and the Native Frenchmen and Native Spaniards” together, aiming to

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<sup>12</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*; 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

<sup>13</sup> Private education options were available for both wealthy and indigent free black students. This included the *Institute Catholique des Orphelins Indigents*, financed both from tuition paid by those who could afford it, and from charity gathered for those who could not. There were very few education outlets for the enslaved black population, as an 1830 law expressly forbade the education of slaves. The Ursuline nuns and the Sisters of the Holy Family, among other religious orders, navigated around this by teaching basic literacy to slaves through catechism, however on the whole, slaves were illiterate and uneducated in the antebellum period.

<sup>14</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 34. Parenthetical notation original to the primary document.

“induce the rising generation to consider themselves one people.”<sup>15</sup> Could the schoolhouse once again function as a social equalizer, in the chaos following the Civil War?

The Constitutional Convention debated this. To be sure, fully integrated schools would be an ambitious undertaking, one not attempted by any other community in the South, and by only a handful across the nation at this time. But a starkly different colonial tradition, with looser definitions of race and with the dominant narrative of white superiority and black inferiority “neither automatic nor implicit,”<sup>16</sup> in New Orleans this debate was novel, but not remarkable. The convention approved a provision for equal access to education, where: “all children of this State between the ages of six (6) and twenty-one (21) shall be admitted to the public schools or other institutions of learning sustained or established by the State in common without distinction of race, color, or previous condition. There shall be no separate schools or institutions of learning established exclusively for any race by the State of Louisiana.”<sup>17</sup> This constitution was adopted handily, approved by a 61 to 12 vote.<sup>18</sup> Louisiana was readmitted to the Union, and Reconstruction could finally begin.

But despite this constitutional guarantee for integration, and general public support for the experiment, schools were integrated on paper only. Under the influence of Robert Mills Lusher, State Superintendent of Public Education and “an unyielding white supremacist,” as well as New Orleans Superintendent of Public Schools William O. Rogers, the schools remained steadfastly segregated.<sup>19</sup> Henry Clay Warmouth, governor of Louisiana during this transition, attributed the delay in implementing integration to the fact that “the law, of course, was a dead letter; colored men and women never attempted to avail themselves of its provisions. Public

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> L.A. Const., title VII, art. 135.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 27.



sentiment was strongly opposed to it, and the colored people were too wise to undertake to force themselves upon white people who did not want them.”<sup>20</sup> These roadblocks ensured that progress would continue glacially.

Yet these traditional views of race constructed by Americanist assumptions continued to be challenged by both Whites and Blacks alike leading into and immediately following the Civil War. The *Tribune* proclaimed in a July 9, 1867 editorial, “a nation cannot have unity and strength, unless all children be educated in the same schools.”<sup>21</sup> On May 21, 1868, the principal of the Bayou Road School, a public school for white girls, was brought in front of the Orleans Parish School Board and accused of the crime of integration. Just the month prior, Public School Superintendent William O. Rogers sent out a memo explicitly directing principals to disregard the constitutional mandate.<sup>22</sup> The principal was charged with intentionally and maliciously allowing black girls to enroll in the school, knowing that their proper place was at the black girls’ school on North Rampart Street.<sup>23</sup>

The principal’s defense was that she did not know the students were black, for had she known, she certainly would not have let them into her school. It wasn’t until neighbors of the black students identified them as such that she found out their race, and promptly directed them to leave. This defense was not sufficient. Shortly after hearing her case, the principal of the Bayou Road School was relieved of her duties. Once that business was concluded, the board

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Clay Warmouth, *War, Politics and Reconstruction: stormy days in Louisiana* (Columbus, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2006 [1930]), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*, 45-6.

<sup>22</sup> William O. Rogers Collection, MS648, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La. Rogers’ memo advised teachers to “fortify the minds of their pupils against the effects of any sudden alarms, such as will sometimes occur in large cities and are liable to occur at any day, in the present feverish condition of society.”

<sup>23</sup> Orleans Parish School Board Archives, MS147, “Orleans Parish School Board, minutes, August 29, 1865 – June 2, 1869,” Louisiana and Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans; New Orleans, La. According to a letter on file in the William O. Rogers collection (MS648, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University), teachers were given the order that “any [black] pupil applying for admission to the schools which have been established exclusively for white children, they shall not, under any circumstances, admit such pupils... any Teacher violating the above will be liable for dismissal.”

passed a resolution reinforcing the superintendent's stance on maintaining segregated schools, requiring that any black children found in the classrooms of white children will be immediately transferred to proper black schools, and teachers and principals responsible be dismissed.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to remember that “race” is a cultural rather than biological construction, as evidenced in the misidentification of black students at Bayou Road School. This confusion over race reflects a fluid set racial identifiers where outward appearance only partially determines



race. Figure 2.1 shows a photograph of a “Negro” family from c. 1900 displaying a wide variety of skin tone, reflecting how a “Negro” student could be mistaken for white, and vice versa.

Paired with wealth, occupation or family connection, a light-skinned person of color could easily “pass” for white. This common phenomenon reflects the social, cultural and racial diversity of New Orleans that set it apart from other areas of the rural South

Figure 2.1: Photograph of a “Negro” family, c. 1900<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Orleans Parish School Board Archives, MS147, “Orleans Parish School Board, minutes, August 29, 1865 – June 2, 1869,” University of New Orleans, New Orleans, La. The principal’s response to this accusation was that “it was never to my knowledge that they were colored, and only identified the children as such by “some of our pupils living in their neighborhood.”

<sup>25</sup> George François Mugnier; Mugnier Collection, Hill Memorial Library; Louisiana State University; Baton Rouge, La.

South surrounding the Civil War,<sup>26</sup> and established a dramatically different historical narrative. Although geographically Southern, the liberal French Catholic upbringing of New Orleans made racial attitudes common in the rest of the South not widely accepted, especially when considering the status, privilege, and role of black citizens, challenging traditional constructions of race and especially blackness.<sup>27</sup> As the Civil War loomed, the racially progressive French influence on New Orleans society gave way to more stringent American views which regarded all people of color inferior to white. The clear preference was to be regarded as white and to have access to the social and cultural capital that came along with it, and the “black” students at Bayou Road School weren’t in a position of correcting anybody.

But despite resistance, integration moved ahead, primarily motivated by black parents eager to gain access to a white social system that even with the increased opportunities available in New Orleans, was just out of reach. Whiteness in this period and still today is both privilege and property with a certain “absoluteness or inalienability”<sup>28</sup> which can be passed down from one generation to the next and can be conferred upon someone. Although there is no direct value associated with whiteness, the “relative political advantages extended to whites” through social capital makes it the preference, endowing whiteness with significant and immutable cultural capital.<sup>29</sup> The push for integrated schools among black parents was seen as a tangible opportunity to gain some of these resources of whiteness for their children.

By the winter of 1870, this push among black parents, aided by the liberal state government under Governor Warmouth controlling the Department of Education’s purse strings,

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<sup>26</sup> Somers, “Black and White in New Orleans,” 20. Indeed this diversity also set it apart from other cities all across the United States, not just in the South.

<sup>27</sup> Harlan, “Desegregation in New Orleans public schools during Reconstruction,” 674.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Fasching-Varner, “No! The team ain’t alright! The institutional and individual problematics of race.” *Social Identities*, 15(6), 2009, 818.

<sup>29</sup> Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” 285.

succeeded in commencing school integration. One *Daily Picayune* article described this effort as a “successful attempt of admitting children into the white schools,”<sup>30</sup> however the white population on the whole did not embrace the change. Another article claimed “as matters stand, our public school system is, indeed, seriously threatened,” foretelling that “the mixture of the races in schools is so repugnant that not one parent in a hundred will suffer a child to attend a school where white and colored are indiscriminately mingled.”<sup>31</sup>

Although a slight increase in Catholic school enrollment occurred around the time indicating a white desire to disassociate from the public schools, this apocalyptic prediction was never realized.<sup>32</sup> In fact, since the first schools to integrate were the best schools in affluent and culturally diverse neighborhoods, many parents – white and black – clamored to get their children into the mixed schools, regardless of their personal views on the issue.<sup>33</sup> These schools were simply better run, better funded and of better quality, and so politics aside were the most popular choices.<sup>34</sup> The integration occurring in 1870 lacked pomp or fanfare, and a simple policy of admitting black students when they applied was adopted.<sup>35</sup> This was, for many black parents, the desired outcome, where the primary goal of integration was less about symbolism or a desire to create a Utopian society, and more about securing access to better schools, which for the time were the white ones with their increased “property value.”<sup>36</sup> Although the media continued to

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<sup>30</sup> “Mixed Schools,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 12 January 1871.

<sup>31</sup> “Mined Schools,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 24 November 1870.

<sup>32</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana*, 118. The number of Catholic schools increased from 10 schools in 1868 to 91 by 1871. Although this is a significant increase, much of it can be explained by the increase in population at the time, as well as more accessibility to basic and higher education for not only people of color, but also indigent white students, and to a lesser extent, girls.

<sup>33</sup> Harlan, “Desegregation in New Orleans public schools during Reconstruction,” 667-8.

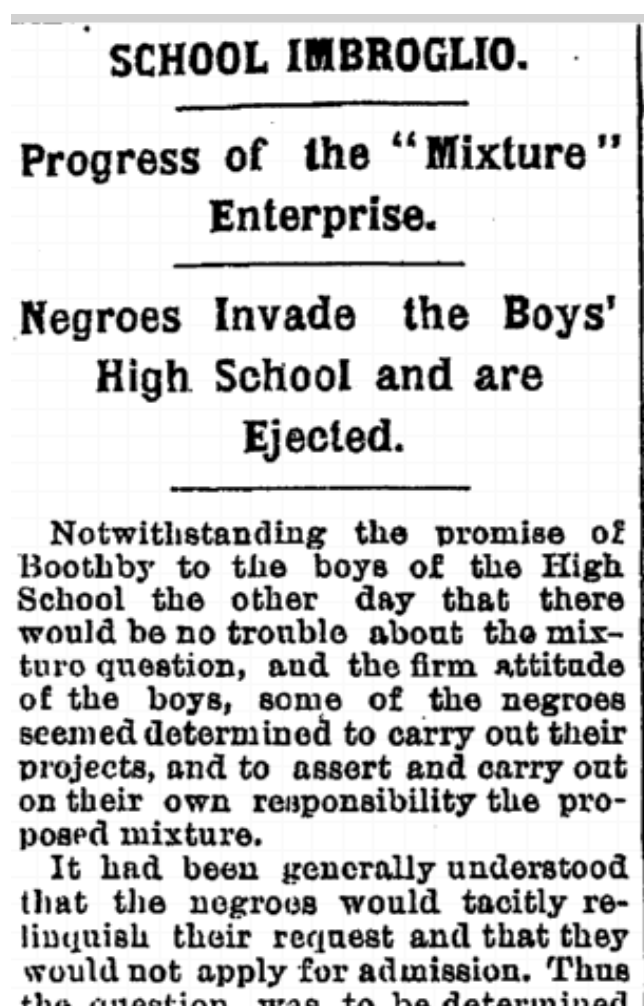
<sup>34</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 73.

<sup>35</sup> Harlan, “Desegregation in New Orleans public schools during Reconstruction,” 666.

<sup>36</sup> Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: black teachers in the segregated South* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

Speak out in opposition, the most powerful of all in this question – the parents – had made their decision, and continued to send their children to integrated schools.

However, this progressive liberalism, nurtured by white Northern philanthropists and derided by the class of Southern planters, was caught in the crosshairs of ideological warfare. A newspaper clipping from 1874 in Figure 2.2 captures the violence that erupted on a December morning in 1874 at the Central Boys' and Upper Girls' High Schools. This upheaval was a product of the conflict between North and South, reflecting an eruption of frustration among



socially dominant white New Orleanians, tired of the value of their whiteness redistributed, especially by "carpetbagger" Northerners. Although integration and the social experiment that surrounded it had its local supporters, on the whole it too dramatically challenged the dominant narrative on race roles and too significantly eroded the value of whiteness.

Exploring the school composition book of Upper Girls' School student Ada V. Benedict, valedictorian of the Junior Class at the time that the 1874 riot occurred, reveals dominant and gendered attitudes toward

Fig 2.2: Newspaper from December 17, 1874<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup>"School Imbroglio," *Daily Picayune*, 17 December 1874, America's Historical Newspapers.

education and diversity that contribute to fury over integration, leading to the riots. Ada's academic record, as well as her self-professed love of learning demonstrate a passion for education and enrichment of young minds expected of the elite female intelligentsia.<sup>38</sup> However noble this respect for knowledge and educational advancement, it reflects the cultural capital of a privileged young white woman, casually ignorant of those very black students who strove to advance themselves by seizing upon their constitutional right to attend her school. Like so many of her classmates and acquaintances, Ada's compositions betray white detachment from black social struggles.

In a June 17, 1875 composition on labor, Ada marvels at steam power and idealizes the farmer and the seamstress, yet in no way acknowledges the hardship of labor, or the class associations tied up in it. Similarly, in a September 20 composition, she further discounts menial physical labor as inferior, writing, "were it possible to estimate the amount of labor performed in one day by the busy workings of the brain, it would put to shame the small amount accomplished by manual labor."<sup>39</sup> This sentiment reveals a window into a broader white society, betraying the sentimentalities of young women who had been too well protected from the social realities of the city around them, and despite their eloquence, intelligence and education, represented the next generation of a "ruling elite" woefully ignorant of complex social realities, and further reinforcing a status quo on racist ideology.

The riots of December 14 foretold the death of the public school experiment in integration of the 1870s. Some contemporaries saw the rioting as a definitive answer to the "public school question," arguing that after this, "there is no danger that mixed schools will be

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<sup>38</sup> Benedict Family Papers, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La. This collection also included a certificate for Julia A. Benedict, likely Ada's mother, inducting her as a "Lifetime member" of the Public School Lyceum and Library Society, on July 23, 1862. Education was clearly a priority in the Benedict family.

<sup>39</sup> Benedict Family Papers, MS461, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

forced upon us here.”<sup>40</sup> Others saw it as a forceful beacon, demonstrating the “system of ‘mixed schools,’ well known by its supporters to be obnoxious to [the white taxpayers],” at risk of “great danger or destruction of the public school system.”<sup>41</sup> Still, some recognized this event for what it ended up being: the harbinger of much greater and more unsettled trouble to come.

Just eleven years after the Louisiana constitution revolutionized, if unintentionally, public post-war education, Reconstruction swiftly came to an end. President Ulysses S. Grant quickly removed all federal occupation troops from the South in an effort to patch a fraying American society, restoring New Orleans and Louisiana to local white supremacist rule. The experiment in integrated education was over, and within a year a new constitution would be drafted yet again, bringing a swift if untimely death to integration.

If whiteness has a property value and cultural capital, then the absence of whiteness – or in this case, the experience of being African American, confers a position of social inferiority and in the case of Reconstruction-era politics, limited political power. The advances made in increased black agency and political enfranchisement were expedited by the outsider Reconstruction government, and so this newfound power was linked to the authority of the carpetbaggers – sadly temporary. Similarly, instead of being born of a multiracial society with a long history of historically black educational institutions, the schools were authorized by the same “foreign” Northerners, whose power came at the expense of the white male Southerners in power before the war. In any other city this heavy-handed reconfiguration of the social milieu might not have come across as such an affront, but in New Orleans – a city of pirates and rogues historically unwilling and uninterested in outsiders meddling in local affairs – it was unforgiveable. Upon the withdrawal of the occupying troops in 1877 and the end of

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<sup>40</sup> “Too Much Enthusiasm,” *The New-Orleans Times*, 19 December 1874.

<sup>41</sup> “Mixed Schools, the Directors Committee on High and Normal Schools,” *The New-Orleans Times*, 17 December 1874.

Reconstruction, the removal of the Northern thumb from the scale and the return of conservative white Southerners to positions of political power, the integrated schools of New Orleans quickly shuttered and the power of black citizens diminished. Left in this wake were public schools which were separate, but inherently and increasingly unequal. It became apparent that integrated schools would be, at least for the meanwhile, a memory.

In the short period between 1871 and 1872, somewhere between 500 and 1,000 black students and several thousand white students enrolled in 19 mixed-race public schools throughout the city of New Orleans.<sup>42</sup> When “this experiment in duochromatic education” ended in 1877 with the end of Radical Reconstruction, over a third of the public schools of New Orleans were integrated.<sup>43</sup> Although the numbers supporting the success of integration are impressive, it must be remembered that for every student enrolled in even a nominally desegregated school, two more were enrolled in a school that still consciously and actively maintained a racial divide like Central Boys’ and Upper Girls’ High Schools. When considering the black student population, it was closer to ten students in segregated schools for every one student in a desegregated school. None of these statistics consider the number of students who actually shared classrooms with students of the other races, a number which is certainly trivial.<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, the integration movement of the 1870s was too divergent from the dominant narrative of influencing Southern narratives to be sustainable. As it conflicted with and eroded local white property value, it contributed to frustration, the perception of *white* disenfranchisement at the hands of the North, and ultimately was rejected. The *Times* published an editorial in its February 6, 1868 edition that the effort to provide education to the black community would certainly “destroy the country and make it no fit habitation for decent white

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<sup>42</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*, 119.

<sup>43</sup> Somers, “Black and White in New Orleans,” 24-5.

<sup>44</sup> Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana 1862-77*, 131.



men.”<sup>45</sup> The erosion of white status and even the threat of its eclipse by a rising black population were terrifying for the elite. This resulted in the rejection of the black counternarrative as a method of white self-preservation.

By 1877, with Reconstruction winding down and the political climate turning away from federal control and back to state control, the local newspapers lit up yet again with discussion on the fate of the free schools. Although strong voices in opposition prevailed, there were also more moderate voices that proclaimed faith in the constitution, such as a *Daily Picayune* article that argued reverting to mandatory segregated schools “is, I consider, a violation of the pledge of the people of Louisiana,” in violation of the constitution.<sup>46</sup> Another, while opposed to integrated schools, agreed that due process was necessary: “We are inclined to think the course adopted by the hoard wrong, simply, however, because it is forbidden by one of the articles of the State constitution; and the fundamental law, however foolish or inconvenient, should be obeyed until it can be repealed.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite this moderation, and in concert with the much greater social pressure to close integrated schools, in 1877 the Orleans Parish School Board proposed addressing the last “obstacle of an embarrassing character, and that can be effective removed only by an amendment of the anomalous provisions of articles 135 and 136 of the State constitution. No so unwise and unnecessary a mingling of social relationships in public schools is to be found in the constitution of any other American State.”<sup>48</sup> Following the fall of the Reconstruction government, white school boards chaired by anti-integrationists swiftly began constructing black schools, locations

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<sup>45</sup> Fayette Copeland, “The New Orleans Press and the Reconstruction,” *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 30(1), 1947, 19-20, 22.

<sup>46</sup> “Mixed Schools: a colored committee wait on the Governor,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 27 June 1877.

<sup>47</sup> “The School Question in New Orleans,” *The Daily City Item* (New Orleans), 14 July 1877.

<sup>48</sup> Louisiana State Board of Education, “Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education,” iv.

pictured in Figure 2.3. Belief was that as long as black students had schools available to them, the push to enter otherwise white schools would be diminished.<sup>49</sup>

This failed experiment set off a chain reaction in the march toward Jim Crow, cementing the property value of whiteness in systems of education, leaving black children the option of either passing for white as best as their society would allow them such as the Bayou Road school students attempted, or to be marginalized as second-class.<sup>50</sup> Black voters remained enfranchised

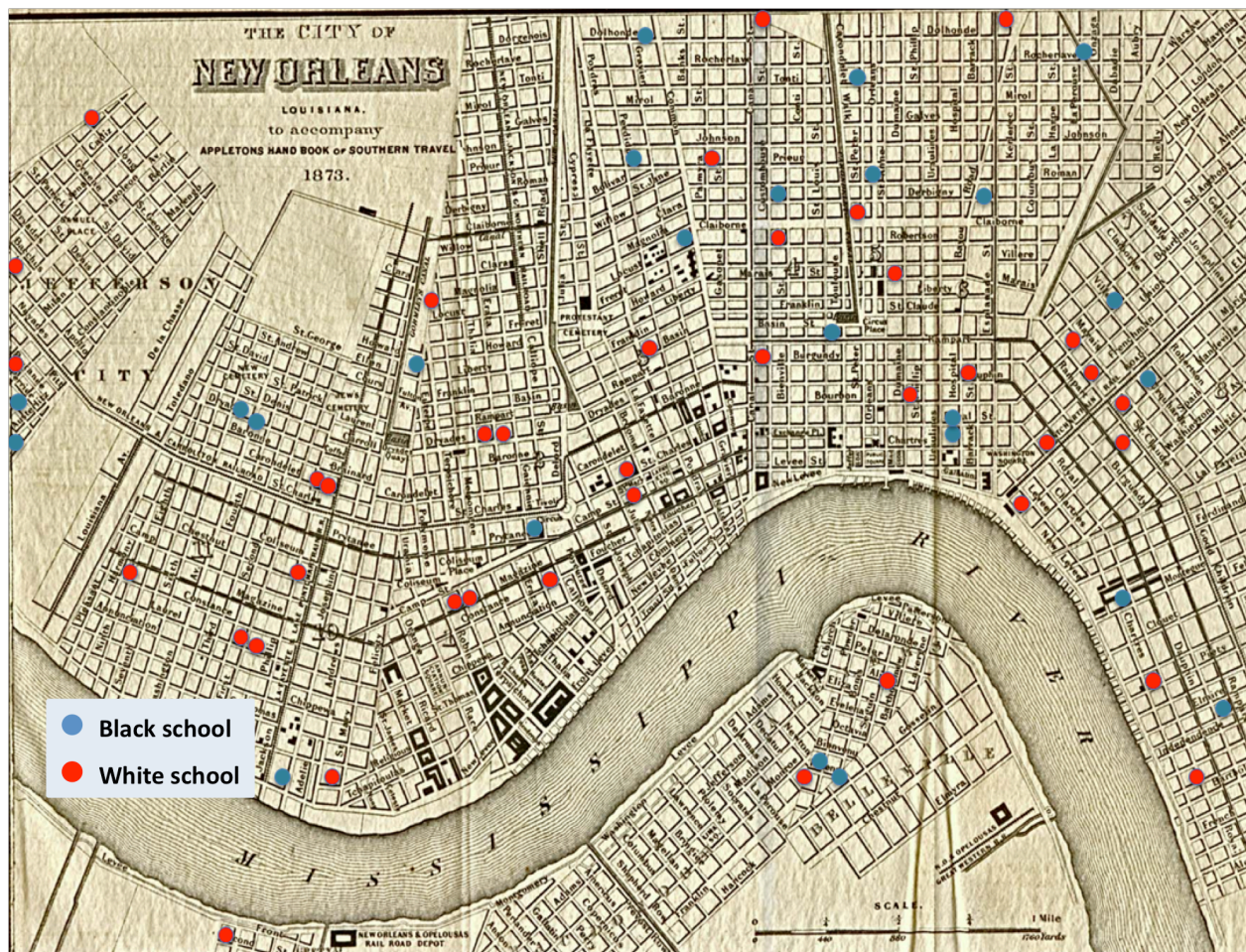


Figure 2.3: Location of New Orleans public schools, 1877<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City schools*, 66.

<sup>50</sup> Celine K. Rousseau and Adrienne D. Dixon, "The First Day of School: a CRT story," in Dixon and Rousseau, ed.s, *Critical Race Theory in Education*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Map source: Charles H. Jones, *Appleton's hand-book of American Travel* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1873); School data: Louisiana State Board of Education, "Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education" (New Orleans: Office of the Democrat, 1878).

through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century preserving a modicum of equity and agency. As late as 1982, State Education Superintendent W.J. Jack expressed in a biennial report “no apprehension of any general social intermingling of the two races.” He further affirmed the power of education to transform “the Negro” into “a good citizen, and his race be elevated to a much higher plane than he now occupies.”<sup>52</sup> These statements of optimism for future black progress and black success issued by a white educational leader would be almost unthinkable in another 50 years.

By 1900 the situation deteriorated quickly as the once progressive Louisiana school system began resembling those of the rest of the South. Popular and dominant white opinion declared black students inherently and inevitably inferior to white, taking the cultural capital assigned to white for granted. Efforts to invest in equal facilities, equal funding and equal opportunities were therefore rendered pointless, and a waste of taxpayer money. Although this shift was not without opposition, the white supremacists controlling the school board and the government were able to easily push this ideology into legislation, budget and the operation of the public schools.<sup>53</sup>

### **Meanwhile, In the Village...**

As race tensions mounted in New Orleans, the choice for Blacks was assimilating into white society and culture by trading in black identity for white, to escape to the North or to France and start a new life with less distress, or to keep heads down and try to be ignored. But nearby a new option was emerging, and its name was Fazendeville.

From outward appearances, Fazendeville didn't seem to be anything special. It was settled on the former sugarcane plantation of Ignace de Lino de Chalmet, better known as part of

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<sup>52</sup> W.J. Jack, *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education for 1890 – 1891* (New Orleans: E.P. Brandao, 1892), 35.

<sup>53</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 118.

the battlefield in the last great engagement of the War of 1812.<sup>54</sup> Although a monument to the battle was erected nearby, and a National Cemetery flanked the far side of the lot, this parcel of land fell into obscurity shortly after the smoke of the cannons cleared.

The land changed hands several times throughout the next half century, but eventually by 1854 was owned by Jean-Pierre Fazende, a free man of color of New Orleans. Upon his death in 1857, the land passed through probate to his son, also named Jean-Pierre Fazende, a grocer of New Orleans.<sup>55</sup> There is no indication that the younger Fazende had any interest in his inheritance at first, as no improvements or changes were made to the property for nearly a decade. However by 1870, Fazende found eager buyers for his arpent.<sup>56</sup> Although this swampy land lacked even a road connecting it to the city, it had two notable and valuable features: cheap land, and seclusion from the volatile city. (Figure 2.4)

Fazende subdivided his lot, and sold it off as 33 individual plots (Figure 2.5), purchased in the years following the Civil War by freed slaves. Unable to come by their 40 acres and a mule, these settlers were content enough with a small parcel large enough to build a modest home. Fazendeville was close enough to the city to be outfitted with all necessary supplies, but just far enough away to be forgotten by the white establishment. Although at times this isolation and segregation would result in a struggle to get basic amenities and services for the community, more often than not the agency and peace this isolation and segregation brought was welcomed.

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<sup>54</sup> The Battle of New Orleans was fought at this location on the morning of January 8, 1815. Nearly 8,000 British troops marched across the field to invade New Orleans, halted by a diverse army of 3,000 Americans led by Major General Andrew Jackson. The short battle was disastrous for the British, who suffered more than 2,000 casualties, compared to fewer than 20 on the American side. This ended up being the last major battle of the War of 1812, and as the only decisive American victory in the war served as an exclamation point for American claims of military superiority. This engagement and the hero status that it bestowed upon Jackson vaulted him to the presidency over a decade later.

<sup>55</sup> Jerome Greene, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. *Historic Resource Study: Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (1985): 206.

<sup>56</sup> An arpent, or longlot, is a measure of land derived from the pre-metric French system of weights and measures. Since frontage on the Mississippi River was the most valuable feature in real estate of the time, from the early colonial period, land was divided into narrow sections along the river that extended up to a mile back into the cypress swamps.





Figure 2.4: Flooded field surrounding Fazendeville, c. 1960<sup>57</sup>

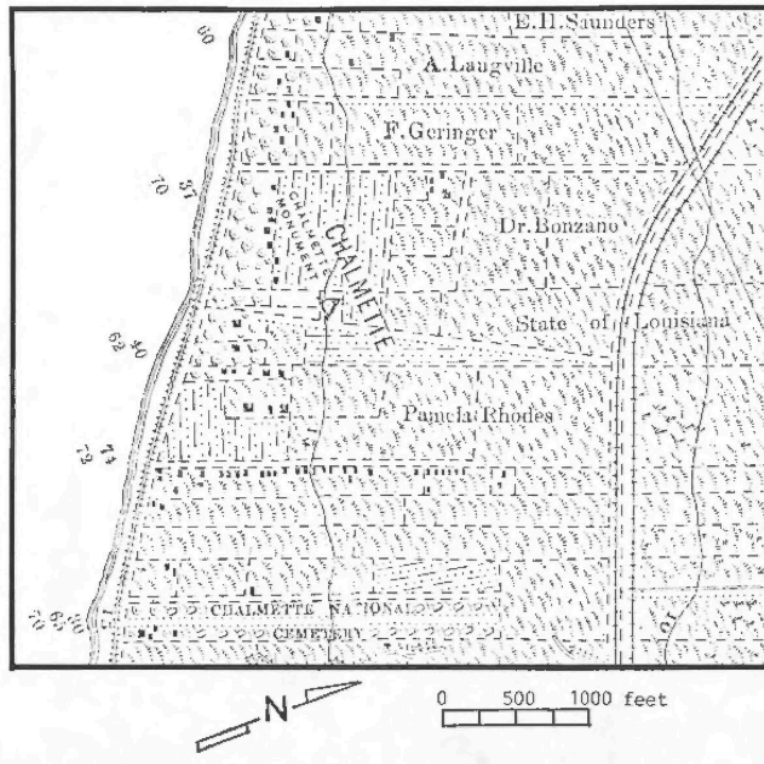


Figure 2.5: Map from 1874 showing Fazendeville houses (at marker 74)<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, La.

## Fazendeville and Integration

Like the narrative in New Orleans, the requiem of Fazendeville also starts off with promise and hope. Can there be such a thing as separate, but equal? The families that established the Village were confident that there could be, rejecting the narrative of integration in New Orleans, rejecting the property value of white society, and instead electing to establish a segregated black community. This overture establishes a narrative for themselves entirely divergent from both the dominant Southern narrative on race and integration and divergent from the established counternarrative of New Orleans. And at least for the first 30 years of the town's existence, that dream, while still evasive, proved to be enticingly tangible. Eventually, as in New Orleans, this overture would deconstruct into a dirge.

Like many Blacks in the South, the road to equality for the people of Fazendeville went straight through a schoolhouse. One of the first institutions established along "Fazende's Lane" running through the subdivision was a school. Lucy Boyer Thomas, Fazendeville resident born in 1923 reflected on the school as "just a country school. It's just like the red school you've heard about? Well that's the way it used to be."<sup>59</sup> Like the bucolic picture that Thomas paints, the Fazendeville school occupied a one-room multi-purpose hall in the Village.<sup>60</sup> One teacher served approximately 30 students throughout most of its history, instructing students in first through sixth grades,<sup>61</sup> illustrated in figure 2.6.

Of the 203 residents living in Fazendeville in 1940, the largest single group, 47 people, had no formal education. However, this made up only 23 percent of the total population of the

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<sup>58</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

<sup>59</sup> Lucy Boyer Thomas, oral history interview, November 21, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> The school was held in Progressive Hall, the multipurpose assembly space owned and maintained by the Progressive Benevolent Society, one of two social aid and pleasure clubs that existed in this small town.

<sup>61</sup> According to the 1940 census, 34 students of Fazendeville ages 7 to 17 attended school, 81 percent of the total school-age population.

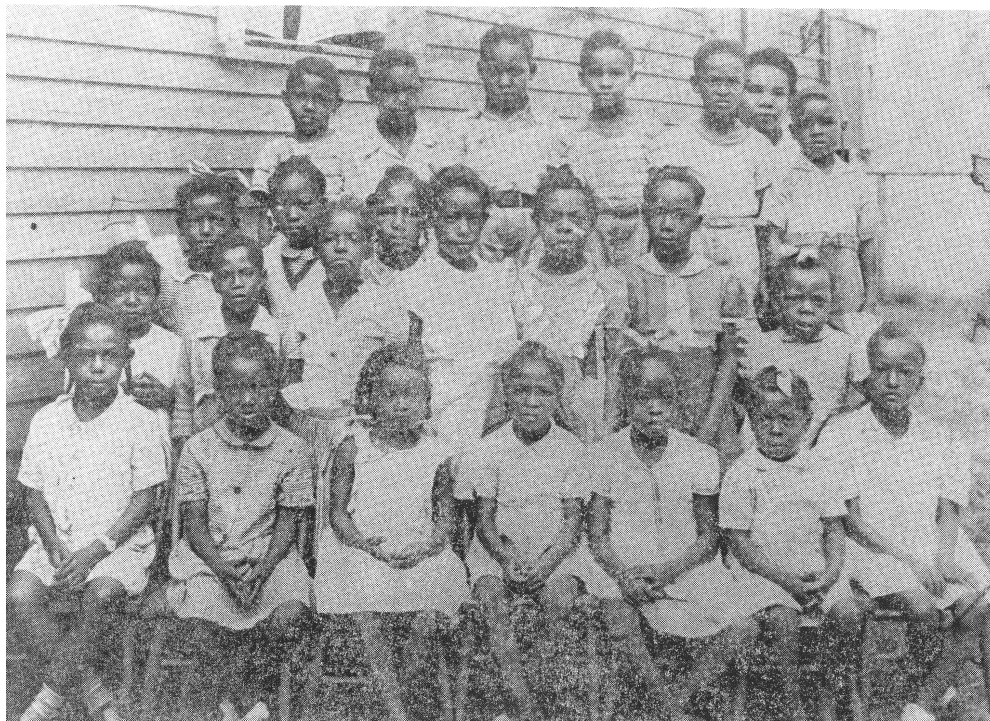


Figure 2.6: Class portrait from Fazendeville School, c. 1925 – 1955<sup>62</sup>

Village. The majority of residents had some kind of education, with the median level of education reached a 5<sup>th</sup> grade schooling. 86 residents, about 42 percent, had completed some elementary school, which was easy enough with a school in the community. However, 70 residents, 35 percent of the population in 1940, continued on in their education, which required leaving the community. Most of those would go on to graduate from Middle School, although few went beyond an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. Only 31 residents of Fazendeville in 1940, about 15 percent of the total population had any education above middle school. Of those, 12 had at least a high school diploma, and only 4 had completed a college degree.<sup>63</sup>

These education levels are actually higher than the average for black Louisianans in 1940, and comparable to the education level of all residents in St. Bernard Parish. The

<sup>62</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

<sup>63</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United State: 1940* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942).

elementary and intermediate education that Fazendeville provided was not unusual for the time, with the Fazendeville School, its limited funding and its one-room configuration serving students up to eighth grade, was not unique. According to Philip Johnson, the black schools of Louisiana suffered from “extreme neglect and overcrowding... housed in small church buildings, lodge halls, or plantation cabins.”<sup>64</sup> However in this neglect, there was also opportunity.

According to historian and social theorist Gunnar Myrdal, the black teachers of the rural South had far more independence in their classrooms than urban teachers or white teachers because “the white superintendent and the white school board ordinarily care little about what goes on in the Negro school.”<sup>65</sup> This was certainly true of Fazendeville, whose residents supported an institute of education before the city was willing to pay a teacher or construct a building for the school to occupy. The earliest, vague records of official public schools in St. Bernard Parish don’t begin until 1877, however there was almost certainly an informal school at Fazendeville before that.<sup>66</sup> This 1877 record refers to re-establishing after a period of closure due to budget cuts two white schools and three black schools, teaching reading, writing, arithmetic and geography, and serving 154 students.<sup>67</sup> Although there are no school board records specifically listing the schools by name and location until 1891,<sup>68</sup> it is likely that the Fazendeville School was one of these three black schools.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Philip Johnson, “Confronting the Dilemma: Charles S. Johnson’s study of Louisiana’s black schools,” in Edward F. Hans, ed., *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Vol. VIII: the age of the Longs* (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana, 2001), 251.

<sup>65</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: the Negro problem and modern democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 880.

<sup>66</sup> Davies, Joseph J., “The Development of Public Education in St. Bernard Parish since 1877,” (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1948), vii.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>68</sup> The school board archives have long since been lost, however the *St. Bernard Voice*, the local weekly newspaper established in 1890, published school board proceedings sporadically throughout the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and much more regularly into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On March 14, 1891, the *Voice* referenced “one colored school at Chalmette, first ward,” accepting applications for a teaching position.

<sup>69</sup> The newspaper refers to it as the “first ward colored school” until 1898, when it clarifies this school as the one on “Fazende’s Lane.” The March 12, 1898 *St. Bernard Parish Voice*, reporting School Board minutes from a meeting



Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, budget concerns periodically shuttered the schools in both Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes temporarily. This frustrated members of the local communities, with the *St. Bernard Voice* printing an editorial that “ignorance is the greatest difficulty we have to content with to-day, and schools – good public schools – are the things we most urgently need all the time.”<sup>70</sup> This sentiment applied to black students as well, who few Whites would argue did not also need some form of an education. By the new school year starting in the early spring of 1894, there were 21 students enrolled at Fazendeville, at that point the only black school in St. Bernard Parish, attending school for five hours per day, in a session lasting about six months.<sup>71</sup> After another brief hiatus, the schools had resumed by 1899, commencing in the fall and continuing through the spring.

The Fazendeville School was an informal space occupying a multipurpose hall owned by the Progressive Benevolent Society, one of two social aid and pleasure clubs in the village.<sup>72</sup> Progressive Hall is pictured in Figure 2.7 as the two-story building three doors down from the church. It served as a school by day, but as soon as the students left would be use for community meetings, fundraisers, and social gatherings. In 1902, still lacking a formal school provided by the St. Bernard Parish government, there was a motion of Fazendeville residents to “donate a school to the parish.”<sup>73</sup> The town intended to raise the funds to construct a new building, prompting school board member Mr. Nunez to “compliment the colored people on their spirit of

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February 24, announced the teacher at the school on Fazende’s Lane for the upcoming school year would be Sonny Williams, earning a salary of \$25. As winter was sugar season, and coal to heat the schools was expensive, the school year in the late 1800s broke in the winter, resuming around March or April.

<sup>70</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*, November 22, 1890.

<sup>71</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*, February 24, 1894. St. Bernard Parish was later reorganized to have Fazendeville in the second ward.

<sup>72</sup> Social aid and pleasure clubs were institutions of especially black communities of New Orleans at the time and still today. Originally developed as a form of social insurance to provide a respectable funeral or to help support community members who had fallen on hard times, and evolved to serve the community in many other ways such as providing entertainment and in the case of Fazendeville a school.

<sup>73</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*, January 18, 1902.



Figure 2.7: Photograph of Fazendeville with Progressive Hall (two-story building left of center), undated<sup>74</sup>

activity, improvement and progressiveness and upon their law-abiding and law-respecting qualities. He said they had undertaken a meritorious work that commanded the approval, good will, and support of every right-thinking citizen.”<sup>75</sup> This challenges the dominant narrative further, as the Villagers had little patience to wait for white government to provide the resources for an education, instead the community took matters and education into its own hands.

Despite this promising overture, the dream of peaceful and segregated equality began to fade starting around 1900. Despite its autonomy, the Fazendeville School was undeniably treated as inferior. As early as 1900, neighboring white schools had multiple teachers, and even boasted

<sup>74</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

<sup>75</sup> “To Erect a Schoolhouse.” *St. Bernard Voice*. June 14, 1902.

multiple instructional rooms.<sup>76</sup> Facilities such as this were almost unthinkable for the Fazendeville school at the time: the town lacked such basic amenities as a shell road to the outside world as recently as 1913.<sup>77</sup>

Although at one point the black schools of the parish were treated with equal respect in the reporting of the *St. Bernard Voice*, a marked decline is evident in the way that stories were relayed of academic achievements and life in the parish's black schools. In 1902, the paper reported the graduation ceremonies at the Progressive Hall in Fazendeville as "crowded with parents and friends... Teacher Augusta Charles, who is painstaking in the discharge of her duties, was complimented upon the progress made by her school."<sup>78</sup> By 1903, the stories had been pared to reporting that students at all seven schools (black included) read poems and sang songs.<sup>79</sup> By 1904, commencement exercises and other reports of the news from the schoolyards largely bypassed Fazendeville altogether. There was a similar decline in acknowledgement among the school board members. Despite Mr. Nunez's glowing report of Fazendeville School teacher Augusta Charles in 1902, by 1907 parish school Superintendent Clement Story referenced the "five schools" of the parish at a school board meeting. Indeed, the Parish had six schools in 1907, but the sixth school was the black one and for him hardly worth mentioning.<sup>80</sup>

But the black population of St. Bernard Parish, and of nearby New Orleans, was growing. For the 1907 -1908 school year, the parish opened its second black school, at Verret Village. The parish spent \$243 that year for two black teachers serving a total of 155 students, versus \$3,713

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<sup>76</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. November 21, 1900.

<sup>77</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. March 8, 1913.

<sup>78</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. June 5, 1902. [sic] Although the paper was printed with a date of July 5 on the masthead, this is almost certainly a 1902 typographical error. Comparison to the papers surrounding it in the archives suggests that the paper masthead should have read "July 5, 1902." Augusta Charles was the Marion Cager of Fazendeville School at the turn of the century – a fixture in the community who served as teacher for nearly a decade from c. 1900 to 1909.

<sup>79</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. July 7, 1903.

<sup>80</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. January 5, 1907.

on six white teachers serving 357 students. The black population would continue to grow throughout the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, demanding more schools, and more teachers at those schools, even as Fazendeville remained one-room and one-teacher as it always had been.

In 1916, the First Ward Colored Education Committee reopened the conversation on improving the facilities at Fazendeville, asking for financial assistance from the parish government to purchase ground to erect a school for “vocational and industrial training of negro children.”<sup>81</sup> However, like the previous attempt to improve the school facilities by providing for them from within the community, this attempt was also unsuccessful. It is unclear why the school board refused to accept the donation of public school facilities when they had done so for other communities in the past, but as recently as 1922, it appears that the school remained community-owned and simply used as a public school rather than a building owned, operated, and maintained by the public school system.

In 1922, a report of maintenance work done at the white and black schools throughout St. Bernard parish mentioned trimming trees, cutting grass, and patching roof holes. However, despite conditions at Fazendeville School described as “more or less unsatisfactory,” the report concluded that the issues “cannot be remedied under present circumstances.”<sup>82</sup> This conclusion was made despite the fact that the school board budget notes record an annual credit of anywhere from \$15 to \$40 deposited to the “Fazendeville School fund,” a kitty of money that had heretofore not been touched, and as of 1924 had over \$200 in it.<sup>83</sup>

The autonomy of the schools and of the community was indeed a double-edged sword. Although the school and its community did not have to beg for funds for coal to heat the school, or to supplement pay for its teacher, this semi-official status resulted in passive resentment from

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<sup>81</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. January 29, 1916.

<sup>82</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. November 4, 1922.

<sup>83</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. September 20, 1924.

the school board, and general reluctance to do any maintenance work to improve the deteriorating structure. In addition to the physical and structural deterioration of the buildings due to a lack of clear proprietary, there was also an ideological inferiority constructed in passive and nuanced ways by the school board, and exhibited in the recorded proceedings of the school board meetings.

Despite ongoing financial contributions to the school by members of the Fazendeville community that never amounted to any improvement of the deplorable structure, a 1923 address by the parish school superintendent criticized Fazendeville and two other black schools in St. Bernard Parish as stingy. The school board was asking students to collect donations to benefit Charity Hospital, with the eight white schools of the parish collecting nearly \$300, and two of the black schools raising more than \$10 apiece. The Fazendeville School raised only \$4.72, although still managed to collect more than the Merauxville school which raised \$2.45, or the Borgnemouth school which managed to collect only 50 cents. Superintendent J.C. Blanchard reported that “every school except for three colored schools did as well as could be expected” in the fundraising.<sup>84</sup>

This lack of fundraising ability could certainly be the product of a lack of financial ability to raise money because of an income gap that ran along racial lines. It could also be attributed to a community already strapped for cash, having to provide additional funds on top of the taxes already paid to support a public school system which in turn did little to support the community. But this curiously low financial haul, so deeply disappointing to the superintendent, must also be seen as a product of a much broader and deeply historical protest tradition, challenging traditional roles and racial narratives, from which the town itself was originally born. In subtle ways, and to the greatest extent that was realistic for a black community in the Jim Crow South,

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<sup>84</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. August 12, 1922.

Fazendeville challenged notions of white supremacy, white cultural capital, and whiteness as property to disengage from white society and instead create an idealized Other. But this would not last long.

## **Conclusion**

As a self-segregated community, Fazendeville consciously rejected the dominant narrative on integration, yet was not without influence from the authority of this white society they rejected. Although Fazendeville had for years tried to get the school board simply to formally adopt the one-room school that they had provided, they could not. Meanwhile, another one-room school in St. Bernard Parish, donated by an Italian community, was transferred to parish ownership expediently under otherwise remarkably similar circumstances.<sup>85</sup> Throughout the early 1900s in St. Bernard Parish, unlike new white schools financed by the school board, whenever a new black school opened it was through aggressive fundraising by a local black education coalition. It was the black community, not the white local government, which was responsible for the education of the children of color.

This poor treatment and community subsidization is also seen in the case of black teachers. In the late 1800s, black teacher compensation was comparable, if always slightly less, than white teacher pay. This gap slowly widened leading into the 1900s. Black teacher tenure was also far less certain, with the school boards constantly reporting ongoing searches for black teachers to serve in the black schools. Starting in 1904 in St. Bernard Parish, teachers of both races were required to pass teacher qualification aptitude tests and periodical reassessments which served as a way of vetting substandard teachers. Although white teachers with experience in the school system would not have the test re-administered, black teachers specifically were

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<sup>85</sup> *St. Bernard Voice*. October 6, 1906.

required to re-apply to their job every year. There was no seniority or tenure for black teachers, and instead were treated like a first year teacher every year. To fill in for poor teacher pay and little financial support, it was not uncommon for the communities themselves to raise funds to give to the teacher and the school to support the classroom.<sup>86</sup>

After a generation following the end of Reconstruction, despite the advances in education equity and social progressivism seen in the Reconstruction period, strength and influences of counternarratives eroded as Whites assumed social power. This normalized racist behavior, rendering discrimination natural and legitimate.<sup>87</sup> This socially accepted labeling of Blacks as inferior denied them the access to pathways for social advancement: most notably high-quality education and by extension skilled and high-paying employment opportunities. This downward cycle of ideology tied thought, practice, financing, and opportunity together, cementing race and racism at the center of American society, and in this discourse on integration. Although nothing inherent in the quality of skin color necessitates it as a dividing social factor, but with the stake increasingly put in race by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became a foregone conclusion.

Racism was present, but not overpowering as late as the mid-1890s. Until a new draft of the state Constitution issued in 1898, the black population still had considerable political enfranchisement and participated in civil life through voting and holding minor elected offices.<sup>88</sup> But by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these opportunities had disappeared and at times it was easy to forget they had existed at all. The reign of Jim Crow firmly established, the new laws of once-

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<sup>86</sup> The *St. Bernard Voice* recorded school board minutes sporadically throughout the early 1900s, chronicling throughout a two-decade window the shift in treatment for black teachers.

<sup>87</sup> Kimberle W. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: intersectionality, identity, politics, and violence against women of color," in *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement*, ed. K. Crenshaw (New York: the New Press, 1995), 110.

<sup>88</sup> Henry C. Dethloff and Robert R. Jones, "Race Relations in Louisiana, 1877-1891," in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Vol. XI: The African American Experience in Louisiana, Part B: From Slavery to Jim Crow*, ed. Charles Vincent (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 2001), 503.

progressive Louisiana did not merely keep the black population separated from the white, but “constantly pushed the Negro further down.”<sup>89</sup>

This formalized system of disadvantage contributed to the development of shared negative social assumptions, social limitations, and a perception of intellectual and cultural inferiority, becoming a dominant ideology over time. This bleeds into the system of education, supporting, justifying and normalizing substandard education facilities for black students, and restricting men and women of color from higher education and the career opportunities that it provides. By the end of another generation, race was cemented at the dead center of the narrative on education and integration. Limited access to these social institutions and a debt of white cultural capital stunted the black population artificially, limited in their ability to contribute to society by the ignorance with which the white population shackled them and giving no value at all to black cultural capital. In turn, “the prophecy of their inferiority is fulfilled,” further centralizing and giving credence to artificial social and cultural racial differences that didn’t exist just a few generations prior.

But as the divisions between white and black seemed increasingly insurmountable, as relations looked their bleakest, wheels of change began jerking to life. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a civil rights group founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by a diverse group of activists including W.E.B. DuBois, Archibald Grimké and Ida B. Wells, started attacking segregation and its inequality on a national scale. Despite the effort of Reconstruction and Fazendeville to reject white authority and the dominant narrative on integration, by this time, it became painfully obvious that separate but equal was yet another promise unfulfilled. The association used the court system as their primary weapon against

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 510.



segregation, arguing by example that the separate facilities necessitated by systems of civic segregation almost never have truly equal facilities for black citizens. This tactic proved to be successful, as NAACP lawyers under the leadership of Charles Hamilton Houston won suit after suit.

By the mid-1940s, the NAACP legal machine had fully established itself as a force to be reckoned with, especially with the young and vibrant Thurgood Marshall as newly appointed Chief Counsel. Court pressure under the influence of the NAACP began shifting the power of decision-making in schools away from the inherent preferences of the white supremacists in position of power, and toward the marginalized black population. It became increasingly clear to school board members in New Orleans with the judiciary on the side of African Americans that old ways of marginalization, of abhorrent and substandard facilities and of terrorizing could be no more.

In 1948, despite protests of white parents, two unoccupied white schools in New Orleans were converted to black ones. Buckling under this court pressure to improve substandard facilities for black students, the school board acted quickly, primarily motivated by fear and their own eroding agency. Recognizing the influence the court had demonstrated in ensuring equity, and that their own dominance was being threatened, the school board quickly sprung to action in declaring the schools for black students – afraid of a possible court order to integrate fully.<sup>90</sup> However, unfortunately for the power-hungry school boards, black citizens with a newfound voice in the judiciary were not content with more nominal accommodations. By 1951, the Civil Rights movement's primary objective shifted to full and complete integration. Over the course of the next decade, Civil Rights and education groups would fight to make this dream of integration a reality.

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<sup>90</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 224.

This narrative on integration reflects a slow march away from rights and freedoms, consistent with a dirge and reflective of a broader erosion of education opportunities throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although optimism is ahead, for now, this requiem mourns the erosion of agency, and generations of inequality that have created damaging and pervasive social effects. This in turn establishes a deepening hole of inequity, lack of opportunity and disadvantage, a reflection on the feeling of hopelessness that often accompanies a funeral mass. This hole that was created following Reconstruction is a hole that we as a society are still struggling to climb out from,<sup>91</sup> but climb on we shall.

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<sup>91</sup> C. Lawrence III, “The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: reckoning with unconscious racism,” in *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement*, ed. K. Crenshaw (New York: the New Press, 1995), 245.

### III. Cum sanctis tuis

Oh when the saints go marching in,  
Lord how I want to be in that number,  
When the saints go marching in.<sup>1</sup>

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments...in these days it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.<sup>2</sup>

#### **It was an Ordinary Day in New Orleans...**

It was the first day of school. But it wasn't just any first day of school. This day was six years in the coming. Ruby Bridges had been born into a Brown world where school segregation was formally unconstitutional, evidenced by the deplorable conditions in black schools in the South, and pathways were being created for students like Ruby to access a better quality education. But despite these promises, for Ruby, and every black student living and learning in New Orleans up to that point, it didn't mean much.

From the moment the Brown decision was handed down, integration was fought against vehemently in New Orleans. Newspapers of the city starkly denied that black students would ever attend classes with white. The senators and representatives of the state joined a congressional bloc formally rejecting the federal government's authority to uphold the decision. Governor Jimmie Davis sought to assure citizens that never under his authority would desegregated schools arrive in.

But "never," of course, is a long time, and Davis was making a promise he wasn't in a position to keep. By 1960, the Supreme Court made it abundantly clear that failure to do

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<sup>1</sup> "When the Saints Go Marching In" is a classic gospel hymn and more recently a popular jazz standard with uncertain origins.

<sup>2</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

anything other than fully and truly integrate would not be acceptable. This gave Davis' "never" a quickly advancing expiration date. On the morning of November 14, 1960, after every attempt to appeal the court order had been exhausted, Ruby and three other girls set off on a commute to a brave new world. Federal marshals escorted the 6 year-olds on their walk to school to protect them from growing mobs (Figure 3.1).

This brave new world bore striking resemblance to the old one. Parents at McDonogh 19 and William Frantz where the girls were headed pulled their children out of school immediately – fueled by hate, fear, or simply bowing to overwhelming social pressure. By the end of the week, only a handful of students remained. By the end of the year, only 2 percent of the public schools in the entire state were integrated. Louisiana was second only to Mississippi with the lowest integration rate in the United States. The integrated schools of 1960 existed in name only.

### **Integration, Assisted**

After the slow march from equity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seemed all but certain that integration would be a mere memory. But the 1950s arrived *cum sanctis tuis*, and hope glimmered as the push for integration renewed. The "saints" ushering in this change took the unorthodox but not unappreciated form of NAACP lawyers, Supreme Court justices, and federal marshals. This overture initially seemed to herald a more perfect future of peace, integration and equality, the deliverance and ultimate heavenly reward for which the black population of New Orleans had fought for years. But transformation proved to be yet again fleeting, and times of suffering and reflection still ahead.

On May 17, 1954, arguably the most influential Supreme Court decision in American history was handed down.<sup>3</sup> The unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* revitalized the conversation on integration.<sup>4</sup> The decision referred to a study, led by black psychologist Kenneth Clark, which demonstrated that “racial discrimination severely affected the self-esteem of black children”<sup>5</sup> by making them feel inferior to Whites. Such studies were hardly



necessary to illuminate the obvious disparity that existed between the educational facilities available to students of the different races, with those in New Orleans being no exception.

Whiteness brought with it prestige and privilege, with the opportunities its property value provided unavailable to the black students. Although elementary and

Figure 3.1: White protests against school integration, 1960<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Martin, “Shades of *Brown*.” Martin argues this in the beginning of his chapter “Shades of Brown.” Although dramatic, it is difficult to overstate the significance of a decision which affects so universally the social structure of the United States. This decision reached far beyond the formally segregated schools of the South to affect every child and adult caregiver in the United States. After a generation, there wasn’t a person in the United States who was not in some way directly affected by this unanimous decision. There are few if any other decisions that have had such far-reaching importance.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond d’Angelo, “Brown and Beyond: rising expectations, 1953-1959,” in *The American Civil Rights Movement: readings and interpretations*, ed. Raymond d’Angelo (New York: McGraw/Dushkin, 2001), 223. *Brown* was not an isolated case; it was the turning point in a much more extensive campaign by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to challenge legal prohibitions to education equality. Suits successfully filed by the NAACP resulted in 1938 the Court ruling that states were required to provide the opportunity for public education at all levels to black students, evolving by 1948 to require “separate but equal” facilities for the students, and eventually by 1949 to mandate any state which did not have facilities for black students to allow them to attend white institutions.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 224.

secondary schools for black students were readily available, they were commonly understood to be deplorable “owing to gross physical and funding disparities” which had endured for at least half a century.<sup>7</sup> White schools in Louisiana averaged a comfortable 1:30 teacher to student ratio in the period from 1929 to 1945 whereas it was closer to 1:50 in black schools. Meanwhile, black public school enrollment rose throughout this period, continuing to crowd already full classrooms.<sup>8</sup>

The poor quality of black education was well-known in the 1940s and 1950s, contributing to a dominant white understanding of students as depraved and deficient. St. Bernard Parish School Superintendent J. J. Davies describes this in the 1940s as a “vicious circle” where a black students “leaves a culturally backward home setting... receives instruction from a teacher who coems from the csame level of incompetence and he returns to home without having looked very far beyond the pattern which conditions his behavior and thinking.”<sup>9</sup> Given this widespread belief – malicious or well-intentioned – in the terrible and damaging conditions of black education, there was a general acknowledgement that something had to be done, especially among black parents and teachers.

The focus on education in Topeka in the fight for equity was hardly innovative. *Brown* was not an isolated case; it was part of a much more extensive push by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to challenge state-mandated segregation in schools, and to have these cases heard in the highest court of the land: the Supreme Court. Starting around 1935, the NAACP and the Urban League began aggressively pursuing civil rights and equity in

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<sup>6</sup> *Times-Picayune* photograph, 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Martin. “Shades of *Brown*,” 245.

<sup>8</sup> J.B. Cade, “The Education of Negroes in Louisiana,” in Charles Vincent, ed., *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Vol. XI, Part C: From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, (Lafayette, Louisiana: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana, 2001), 229-30.

<sup>9</sup> Davies, “The Development of Public Education in St. Bernard Parish since 1877,” 30.

many realms through litigation. The emphasis for schools for most parents and for the NAACP at this time remained on improving the funding for and quality of black schools rather than insisting on integrating the schools.<sup>10</sup>

In New Orleans, the NAACP actively filed lawsuits to ensure equal access to resources and facilities for black teachers and students. Lawyer Alexander Pierre Tureaud led the charge, filing dozens of civil rights cases including securing black voting registration rights, the right for black students to attend public colleges and universities, and equal pay for black teachers. But even with these victories, progress was almost non-existent. In the 1929-30 school year, black teachers earned an average of 41 percent of what white teachers across Louisiana earned. By the 1945-46 school year, despite court orders requiring equal pay, black teacher pay had increased only seven percentage points, with black teachers earning only 48 percent of white teacher pay.<sup>11</sup> And so by the late 1940s, the primary objective of the movement had shifted. Rather than continue a futile effort for separate equality, black parents began to overwhelmingly demand full and total integration of schools. In this way, the narrative of integration in New Orleans begins coming in concert with what was happening across the nation. The obvious disparities of segregated education were gaining national attention, as they were in New Orleans.

A.P. Tureaud presented a petition to the Board of Education of Orleans parish declaring that all efforts at equity in segregated education up to this point had been unsuccessful, and the black community of New Orleans was demanding integration to ensure equality. The board denied the petition, declaring that “such a radical change of policy would not, at this time, serve the best interests of the system... such a departure from tradition and custom, quite apart from

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<sup>10</sup> D’Angelo, “Brown and Beyond,” 223.

<sup>11</sup> Cade, “The Education of Negroes in Louisiana,” 231. Average annual pay for black and white Louisiana teachers in the 1929-30 school year was \$450.67 and \$1,101.88, respectively. In the 1945-46 school year it was \$801.98 and \$1,683.23, respectively.

the fact that such action by the board would be illegal, could result in chaos and confusion and further, quite possibly cause a very serious worsening of race relationships in the community as a whole.”<sup>12</sup> This setback and stark refusal to ensure equity through a tenacious grasp on eroding power and authority merely emboldened the NAACP efforts, and further justified and legitimized their push for integration.

In partnership with the national NAACP office and legendary civil rights activist and lawyer Thurgood Marshall, the New Orleans branch of the NAACP led by Tureaud continued aggressively pursuing equity and integration, especially in schools. In 1952 Tureaud filed *Early Benjamin Bush et al. v. Orleans Parish School Board*, the first formal challenge to educational segregation in Louisiana. However, with a decision on *Brown* impending, *Bush* was never argued. The national NAACP knew that it had better odds at winning a suit filed in other cities, most notably Topeka, the effects of which would likely apply to New Orleans.<sup>13</sup>

This focus on students in the push for desegregation was deliberate. The case for children and young adults was perceived as more humanizing and accessible for white sympathizers to the cause, and so the NAACP “chose to focus the legal assault on education because of its centrality to advancement and fulfillment within American culture. As such, the blatant denial of equal educational opportunities to black youth touched a powerful nerve in the American psyche.”<sup>14</sup> Educating youth strikes a universally poignant chord, and the NAACP was fully aware of that fact and exploited it. Unlike barring access to lunch counters or public busses, inhibiting a black child from attending a good school represented “a far more compelling symbol

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<sup>12</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 232.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Lee Muller, “New Orleans Public School Desegregation,” in Charles Vincent, ed., *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Vol. XI, Part C: From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, (Lafayette, Louisiana: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana, 2001), 336.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, “Shades of *Brown*,” 235.



of the evils of segregation, and a far more vulnerable target.”<sup>15</sup> Denying black adults the benefit of white institutions and the opportunities that they provided was acceptable to many Whites, part of a broader dominant racist ideology that accepted Blacks as inferior to Whites. But children did not fit as squarely into this paradigm, and there was in place a general social agreement that free public schools for all children were key to a democratic society.<sup>16</sup> Although interpretations of how race and especially integration played into this varied widely, depriving a child of an opportunity for education was understood to be fundamentally incongruent with notions of upward mobility and the American Dream. The NAACP effort to focus on education was based, therefore, on both ideology and strategy, balancing prejudices toward races with a social obligation to and general affinity for children.

However, the nature of this race-based inequality that had persisted under segregation ensured that black families who wanted to fight integration could not with any ease due to a lack of white property value. The revolution against segregation required white cultural capital and resources to enact change – money, intellectual resources, lawyers, politicians, government influence – that were fleeting and inaccessible for most of the black community because of a tradition of white oppression. The black population found themselves caught in a self-perpetuating cycle of disadvantage with education at the center which endures up until this day.<sup>17</sup> Paolo Freire refers to this cycle as a “pedagogy of the oppressed,” where white oppressors so successfully disenfranchise Blacks that these oppressed become incapable of escape from this cycle.<sup>18</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings refers to this as a deficiency model, where Whites judge the

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<sup>15</sup> Derrick A. Bell, Jr., “Serving Two Masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation,” in K. Crenshaw et al., ed.s, *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement*, (New York: the New Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ladson-Billings, “From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt,” 8.

<sup>18</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 1970).

underperformance of black students without acknowledging the sociocultural forces that hold them in that inferior position which Whites themselves are at least partially responsible for.<sup>19</sup>

And so, with only limited sociopolitical power to exercise as a product of dominant attitudes toward race, the black population continued to push against segregation, metered and with caution. Given the ideological power of education, it is no coincidence that the students who ultimately integrated the schools – from the Little Rock Nine to the four New Orleans first-graders – were carefully selected to excel academically and socially in the all-white institutions. Criteria for integration in New Orleans required students to pass lengthy academic and psychological examinations to ensure suitability – in short, students need to demonstrate an ability to “pass” for white, at least academically. Although 137 transfer requests from black students to attend white schools were made for the beginning of the 1960 school year, only five were honored.<sup>20</sup> All five chosen were females, in the youngest grade. This is no coincidence, it was a calculated choice consistent with dominant ideologies labeling children and females especially to be non-threatening and less offensive than their older, male counterparts.

*Brown* proved to be about much more than just education. For white and black alike it was symbolism and destiny wrapped up into one, becoming a dividing line of time splitting history into pre- and post- eras. Perhaps most importantly, it proved to be the hole in the dyke that was the Jim Crow South. *Brown* once and for all “emphasized that in midcentury America, Jim Crow was morally and intellectually indefensible,”<sup>21</sup> and forced Whites to confront racism and its destructive characteristics impairing black and white society equally. However, just as

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<sup>19</sup> Fasching-Varner, “No! The team ain’t alright!” 823. Quoting Ladson-Billings.

<sup>20</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 254. A fifth female first-grader was approved to transfer to William Frantz Elementary School, but withdrew her application shortly before the school year began. In the end only four students integrated in 1960: Ruby Bridges at William Frantz Elementary School and Leona Tate, Tessie Prevost and Gaile Etienne at McDonogh 19.

<sup>21</sup> Martin, “Shades of *Brown*,” 230.

*Brown* proved to be about more than just schools, it also proved that integration would be about more than just crossing a color line.

Although no immediate physical change occurred following the 1954 decision, in the minds of black citizens, expectations for education equity and integration began rapidly evolving, with black leaders' petitions to the white government requesting integrated facilities reaching a fever pitch. A survey of teachers conducted in 1953 and then again in 1956 reflects a dramatic shift along race lines in teachers' opinions on the adequacy of schools. In 1953, before *Brown*, white and black teachers felt similarly about the schools, with a slight white majority feeling the schools were adequate, and a slight black majority saying they were not. However, just three years later, post-*Brown*, the white teachers' perspectives on the quality of the schools remained the same, but now 60 percent of black teachers felt that the public schools were not meeting the needs of students. Some significant shift had occurred in the previous three years to have black teachers, but not white, redefine adequacy in education.<sup>22</sup>

However, *Brown*'s impact for the moment remained strictly ideological. The official school board reaction was denial. Shortly after the decision, a bloc of Southern Senators and Congressional Representatives published "The Southern Manifesto," a treatise rejecting *Brown* as an unconstitutional imposition on state's rights. The Manifesto, signed unanimously by the 10 Senators and Congressmen representing Louisiana in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, labeled the decision "a clear abuse of judicial power...encroach[ing] upon the reserved rights of the States and the people," which threatened to "destroy the system of public education." Their counterargument was that a system of segregation does not erode any rights, but simply allows people to live

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<sup>22</sup> E.C. Hunter, *What New Orleans Teachers Think of the Public Schools: report of attitudes and morale surveys conducted in the New Orleans Public Schools in 1950, and 1956*, (Tulane University: New Orleans, La., 1957), 9.

independently as they want to: without imposing or being imposed upon by anyone else.<sup>23</sup> This bold move constitutes a significant demonstration of white property value, taking for granted that while Blacks were expected to do what the government told them, the white elite assumed that they knew better than the government and were in a position to make corrections.

The refusal of federal authority was made tangible by the adoption of a state constitutional amendment in 1954 specifically requiring segregated schools, and was echoed by Governor Bob Kennon, who maintained, “no school board in Louisiana is faced with an emergency today. We have ample time to work out the problem.”<sup>24</sup> Dr. Clarence Scheps, Orleans Parish School Board member, was asked if the Board intended to prepare an integration contingency plan in the event that the federal government forced integration in New Orleans. He responded simply: “Absolutely not. We will not integrate.”<sup>25</sup>

This denial was echoed in the newspapers of New Orleans. A May 24 *Times-Picayune* article proposed that introducing integrated schools would be quite impossible, “Unless ending segregation is to mean lowering the level of the white schools, if it is to mean raising the level of Negro education to that of the Whites, very large expenditures will be required. It is hard to see how the poorer Southern states will be able to afford it.”<sup>26</sup> Those who did not actively oppose integration were lampooned as traitors, such as six state senators accused of having “abandoned the white children of New Orleans to integration” in the *Times-Picayune* for opposing a bill designed to bypass federal desegregation efforts.<sup>27</sup> Unwilling to acquiesce and determined to utilize all of the sociocultural leverage available to them, the white population determinedly

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<sup>23</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 84<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., 1956, Vol. 102, no. 4.

<sup>24</sup> “Kennon and White Cautious,” *The Times-Picayune*, 18 May 1954.

<sup>25</sup> Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation*, 245.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Lippmann, “Education in Trouble,” *Times-Picayune*, 24 May 1954.

<sup>27</sup> Charles D. Pierce, “Perez attacks Orleans solons: charges ‘traitorous action’ on school bills, *Times-Picayune*, 3 July 1954.

fought integration, even when the courts made it clear that neither delays nor excuses would be acceptable. The local Whites in power were determined to make integration as painful and unsuccessful as possible, on ideological grounds.

But despite local protests, support for educational segregation in the political bloc of the South began to erode. “Border states” such as Maryland, West Virginia, Missouri and Kentucky quickly and voluntarily implemented integration plans. Arkansas, Texas and Tennessee would follow shortly after. It was only the Deep South that proved to be holdouts. But by 1959, after a series of Supreme Court cases made it abundantly clear that there was no loophole, integration was unavoidable, and anything less than swift and genuine efforts would not be tolerated, progress became inevitable. The question was no longer “if” schools would desegregate, the question became “when,” and most importantly, “how?”<sup>28</sup> By the spring of 1960 as the academic year was winding down and preparations for a new and likely integrated one were beginning, a new wave of denial resurfaced. Governor Jimmie Davis vowed that schools would remain segregated, “even if the only way was to close the Orleans Parish schools,”<sup>29</sup> a position which 82 percent of white Orleans Parish parents supported.

Davis reiterated this pledge on August 11 as the schools prepared to open for the 1960-1 school year.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis and justification for segregation remained not, at least overtly, racism – it was argued to be an issue of states’ rights.”<sup>31</sup> By removing race in name from the argument on integration, its opponents sought to gather support for a position even more widespread in New Orleans ideology than racism – fierce independence. This calculated political

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<sup>28</sup> Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation*, 232-3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 246 – 8.

<sup>30</sup> “Governor repeats pledge on school segregation,” *Times-Picayune*, 11 August 1960.

<sup>31</sup> “State’s rights aim stressed,” *Times-Picayune*, 15 September 1960.

move manipulates the narrative of race by Whites to achieve the desired outcome of the maintenance of a system of segregation by any means necessary.

Despite this power play, the court issued an ultimatum: take two more months to get a plan together, but by November, the schools of New Orleans will be integrated. With this deadline, denial turned to anger. A newspaper advertisement with the headline “Parents – protect your children!” taken out by the South Louisiana Citizen’s Council argued, “The few small groups who claim that closing the schools would be a catastrophe contain many well-known integrationists... they speak of the economic and educational hardships they say will arise if the schools are closed. If so, these hardships will only be temporary. But they ignore the permanent hardships your children and community must endure if the schools *are* integrated!”<sup>32</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Times-Picayune*, published September 1, 1960, a citizen wrote, “Fortunately for Louisiana, the *Times-Picayune* does not reflect the sentiment of the majority of the people of New Orleans. If it did, then the people of Louisiana’s largest city would surrender in defeatism and turn their schools over to the federal government. They would abandon their fight against the Warren court’s abominable race-mixing decree and accept integration as unavoidable.... In suggesting that the city yield to racial integration, the *Times-Picayune* knows that its views are in direct opposition to those of an overwhelming majority of the city’s white parents.”<sup>33</sup> Threats and opposition dominated public discourse and reflected the dominant narrative.

However, the narrative in New Orleans was divergent in its extremism. The desegregation of the New Orleans schools should have been painless. By 1960, with the cautionary tale of Little Rock already established, no reasonable person could look at the continuum of history up to that point and conclude the old tactics of ignoring the courts or

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<sup>32</sup> “Parents – protect your children!” *Times-Picayune*, 10 August 1960.

<sup>33</sup> “Critical of T-P Position,” *Times-Picayune*, 1 September 1960.

attacking students would stop integration.<sup>34</sup> New Orleans was not some Bible-thumping entrepôt, but one of the largest and most diverse cities in the United States, with a long history of an educated black middle-class. That this city, “thronged with tourists and businessmen from all over the world – cultured, civilized, heterogeneous New Orleans” could be the site of such mob rule and chaos serves as a testament to the intense desperation of the white population.<sup>35</sup>

On the eve of integration, the *Times-Picayune*, having fought and argued against integration for a decade, conceded only “closing of the public schools would be worse” than integrating them, maintaining however “the damage to the schools which we believe to be an inevitable result of forced integration.”<sup>36</sup> This prophecy turned out to be a self-fulfilling one, with the circus surrounding integration day living up to this, and more, as the resistance took a violent turn.

On the morning of November 14, 1960, four black girls set out to school. They were not seizing a right that never before existed, and not doing something that had never before been done. The students were chosen to integrate two schools in the Ninth Ward – possibly the worst neighborhood in which to attempt such a social experiment. Geographically and ideologically separated from the rest of the city, the residents of the Ninth Ward were long accustomed to sorting out issues within the community on their own rather than relying on the government to impose a solution. This was a mentality that extended to Fazendeville. Populated by middle-class Blacks and working-class Whites, the neighborhood had exceptional underlying class and race issues, flaunting opportunities for upstarting black residents to further erode white property value

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<sup>34</sup> Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation*, 292.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>36</sup> Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City*, 47.

in this neighborhood was virtually guaranteed to create tension.<sup>37</sup> Although integrating the Ninth Ward was a poor choice logistically, it was a very safe choice politically. The poor white residents of this neighborhood had no social capital to wield, no political influence to exercise, and perhaps most importantly no money to withhold from the city or its elected officials.<sup>38</sup>

Federal marshals escorted three students to McDonogh 19<sup>39</sup> in the Lower Ninth Ward, and one to William Frantz in the Upper Ninth Ward, illustrated in Figure 3.2. As they marched,



Figure 3.2: Photograph of federal marshals escorting Ruby Bridges to school, 1960<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation*, 264. Crain points out that “Negroes have always lived in nearly every neighborhood in the city,” and indeed spanned all socioeconomic classes of society. There were sizeable black populations in respectable middle-class neighborhoods with good schools, populated by black families eager to assimilate into white society and provide a high quality education and future prospects for their children, as well as progressive liberal Whites with few oppositions to integration. Not selecting children from these neighborhoods betrays an ignorance for the intricate interrelationship between location, class, race and status in New Orleans among the state board of education (an ignorance which Katrina has evidenced continues through the 21<sup>st</sup> century), or a willingness on the part of Davis and his staff to make integration as painful and likely to fail as possible.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Lee Muller, “New Orleans Public School Desegregation,” 347.

<sup>39</sup> There is a sad irony that one of the schools supported by white philanthropist John McDonogh, who specifically donated his large fortune to the public school system of New Orleans to provide education to indigent students regardless of race, and which bears his name, became central to the opposition to integration and continued disenfranchisement of black education. This demonstrates how far the narrative on race and integration had migrated from McDonogh’s death in 1850 to integration in 1960.



mobs began to form. Even parents of McDonogh and Frantz didn't know which schools were going to integrate that morning, contributing to the circus-like atmosphere that developed.<sup>41</sup> Angry white protestors stood outside of the schools, especially Frantz, yelling obscenities at white teachers and parents who dared to break the boycott and attend school. A mob marched on the education building in the Central Business District. The *Times-Picayune* reported a mob of "rowdy teen-agers and incensed adults snapped the peaceful desegregation of two New Orleans public schools Tuesday. Twelve persons were arrested for unruly conduct... an estimated 10,000 of the 38,000 white pupils in the public school system were absent from classes in New Orleans Tuesday."<sup>42</sup>

The next day, the violence continued, with demonstrations "developed into something else – into roving, yelling, belligerent actions by crowds largely but not wholly made up of youngsters... absent from their classroom duties, and many were in the crowds that verged into what approximated mob action in some places. Quite a list of persons were hurt. Dozens of arrests were made by the police, and in one instance fire hoses were turned against the most boisterous of the demonstrators."<sup>43</sup> As the week continued, white parents still sending their children to Frantz or McDonogh received angry telephone calls, threats, and had their property stoned. By the end of the week only a handful of white students remained, in still-segregated classrooms.<sup>44</sup>

This violent opposition would continue for the next month, as unruly mobs "cursed, shoved, stoned and spat,"<sup>45</sup> blocking the two schools in an attempt to prevent the black students

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<sup>40</sup> *Times-Picayune* photograph, 1960.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Lee Muller, "New Orleans Public School Desegregation," 346.

<sup>42</sup> "12 persons arrested, but no violence reported," *Times-Picayune*, 16 November 1960.

<sup>43</sup> "Violence Futile," *Times-Picayune*, 17 November 1960.

<sup>44</sup> Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City*, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation*, 237.

from gaining entry. By December 14, the “Business and Professional People of Greater New Orleans” begged for an end to the violence, and took out a full-page advertisement in the *Times-Picayune*, imploring citizens for “an end to the street demonstrations... we urge that education of our youth not be interrupted and that dignity be restored to our community.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, dignity was in short supply in 1960.

As more legislation passed, including *Brown*, demanding a higher quality of life and greater equality for people of color, it became a sort of game to see how little the white majority could cede and still technically be following orders as they wielded their white property value to further oppress Blacks by any means necessary. Despite the far-reaching effects of *Brown* mandating balance and equity in the state-funded public schools and requiring open access, the decision had no immediate effect or specific bearing on the *quality* or effectiveness of the system of education which it impacted. Simply requiring balance and equal access to facilities, while a worthy goal, is unfortunately not a solution to the education inequity that existed and continues to exist in this country.<sup>47</sup> Little, in fact, changed with the decision, as white communities unwilling to accept change perceived this as a direct assault on white power and the white way of life in the South. And so the black communities continued to be abused, only now even more overtly than before.

### **Meanwhile, in the Village...**

While protests raged and children trembled on their walk to school in the New Orleans, the country remained quiet and static, but hardly peaceful. Indeed, Fazendeville was growing all too quiet. Although once the village bustled with nearly 40 families, people were slowly moving

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<sup>46</sup>Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City*, 104.

<sup>47</sup>Bell, “Serving Two Masters,” 6.

to the nearby Ninth Ward, to other neighborhoods in Chalmette and St. Bernard Parish, even as far away as California – looking for jobs, for opportunities, for a better school, or maybe just a change of scene.

The neighbors outside the Village were hardly sad to see the residents go. For years the local government of St. Bernard Parish and the National Park Service who owned the surrounding battlefield land had been interested in getting their hands on Fazendeville. As the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans approached, the game changed. A sesquicentennial commission was authorized by Congress to make plans and acquire land in anticipation of 1965.

Some residents were happy to take the government's money and start a new life in a new home somewhere else. Others were reluctant. Would the buyout money cover the cost of a new house? Was it worth fighting the government to stay? But still some patently refused to budge. Generations of family had been born and lived in Fazendeville. It is home, and they were not going anywhere. The fight dragged on for months and for years as the Village slowly emptied out. There were shops with no shoppers, a baseball field with no fielders, and church pews with no prayers. Spanish moss dripped off pecan trees with no one to collect the harvest. The last home was torn down shortly after the big anniversary, revealing a field somewhat reminiscent to a soldier from 1815, but completely unrecognizable to a resident from the year before.

### **Another Reaction to Integration**

The physical dissolution of Fazendeville suggests the physical demise and death that is central to a requiem. Unlike in New Orleans, there was no glimmer of hope for Fazendeville in the 1960s. The situation of integration went from bad to rose, culminating in the unthinkable act

of cultural and social annihilation, and the extreme rejection of ceasing to acknowledge the community's existence.

Fazendeville avoided these challenges and survived through the difficult Jim Crow years by maintaining a low profile. Samuel Gant, born in Fazendeville in 1920, reflected on the Village as a good community where "everybody got along. We were happy. We did not have any violence or killing. Everybody helped each other out."<sup>48</sup> Although the town and its residents were poor, "we felt safe in Fazendeville," resident Yvonne Dorsey agreed, "There were a lot of things we didn't have but everybody was family and we had a lot of love."<sup>49</sup> Three major social institutions rooted this community: church, school, and benevolent societies. Lines between the three tended to blur. The school was held in the benevolent society's Progressive Hall, and students performed pageants and songs at church as a class. Centering this experience was Ms. Marion Cager.

In 2002, Dr. Joyce Jackson of Louisiana State University collected a few dozen oral histories from residents who lived in Fazendeville between the 1920s and the 1960s as part of a broader ethnographic study organized by Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve to document and research the Fazendeville community.<sup>50</sup> The interviews cover many topics, from the holidays celebrated in the Village and the religious rites to how medicine was practiced in

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<sup>48</sup> Samuel Gant, interviewed by Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, La., August 8, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Lloyd and Yvonne Dorsey, interviewed by Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, La., April 13, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> This study originated in the 1990s and is an ongoing attempt to document the establishment and existence of the community. When park ethnographer Allison Peña arrived at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in 1989, there was little knowledge among park staff about the community. Research, meetings with community members, and the oral history interview project helped to expand understanding of this history and this community. Today this research has resulted in an informational wayside sign and a brochure publication for visitors to the site to better understand the community and its history.

this town without a doctor or easy access to New Orleans. But the recurring character, mentioned in almost every interview, is Ms. Marion Cager.<sup>51</sup>

Fazendeville had a one-room school house, and for most of her career, Cager (pictured in Figure 3.3) was its solitary teacher. She began teaching sometime in the early 1920s, and continued until at least 1955.<sup>52</sup> As a teacher and a black woman with a master's degree from Xavier University, Cager was well-respected in the community. This education and communal respect were reflected in intellect and sharp dress, and so, "there were two people you could always tell" a preacher and a teacher, recalls Rev. Theodore Bush, who grew up in the Village in



Figure 3.3: Photograph of Fazendeville students and teacher Marion Cager, c. 1925 - 1955<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Memorial Day celebrations, or "Decoration Day" as the Villagers called it, was another popular topic of conversation. I discuss this tradition further in the fifth chapter.

<sup>52</sup> This chronology is pieced together from the assorted oral history interviews. The oldest resident interviewed, Josie Cager, born in 1911, did not have Marion Cager as a teacher, but recalled that her children did. The earliest interview subjects that remember having Marion Cager as a teacher are Loretta Cager Bush and Rev. Theodore Bush, both born in 1916. Rev. Theodore Sanders, born in 1944 was the youngest resident interviewed and also recalled having her as a teacher.

<sup>53</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

the 1920s.<sup>54</sup> According to the 1940 census, there were four Fazendeville residents with college degrees: two men and two women, including Marion Cager, her sister and her brother. Although no resident had preacher or clergy listed as profession, three of the four residents with college degrees were employed as teachers.<sup>55</sup> Figure 3.4 illustrates the highest level of education achieved by Fazendeville residents: comparable to that of all St. Bernard Parish residents and considerably higher than African Americans generally across the state.

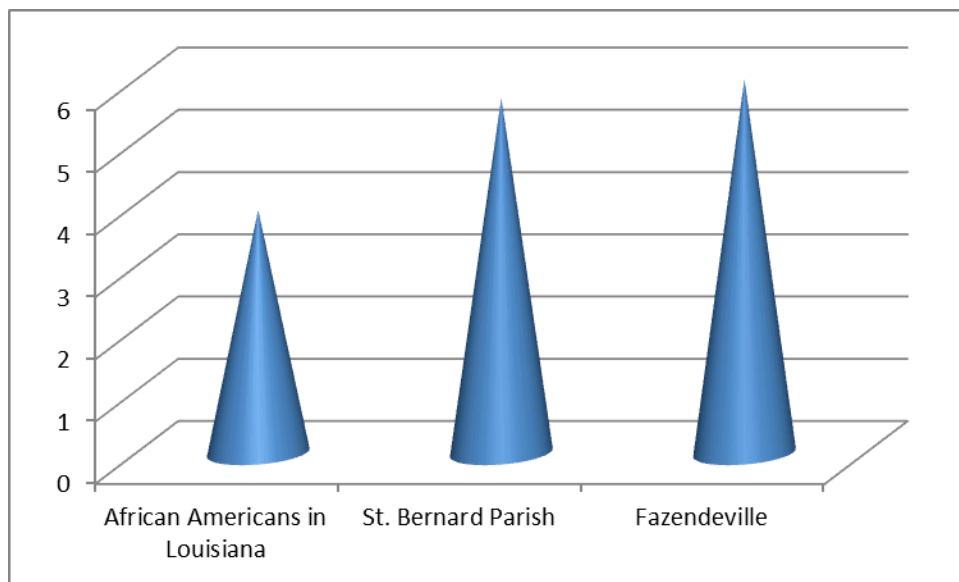


Figure 3.4: Median highest level of education completed, 1940<sup>56</sup>

This dedication to education in Fazendeville not only contributed to a sense of respect surrounding Marion Cager’s role as the teacher, it also gave her great authority, which she wielded freely. “You did not play with Marion Cager,” recalled Wilma Bush Sargent, born in the

<sup>54</sup> Rev. Theodore Bush, interview with Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, LA, April 13, 2002.

<sup>55</sup> The fourth Fazendeville resident with a college education was a National Youth Association supervisor. NYA was a New Deal program to employ youth ages 16 to 25. The lack of listing of preacher/ clergy for any of the Fazendeville residents on the 1940 census is curious. As there were two churches in the community, there was a need for this role. Did the preacher come from outside the community? This seems unlikely given its history and its location. More likely this was considered a part-time, informal, unpaid, or otherwise unacknowledged job by either the community or the census-taker and was not recorded.

<sup>56</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United State: 1940* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942).

Village in 1936, “she was the type... I don’t know, it just seemed like she liked to beat. If the law today was the law yesterday, somebody would have been in jail.”<sup>57</sup> Morris Williams moved to Fazendeville in 1924 at age 2 and had a similar recollection of Cager: “at the time they didn’t spare the rod.”<sup>58</sup> Being the matron of a black school in the rural south in the 1930s and 1940s meant that Cager needed to do more with less out of necessity. Wilma Bush Sargent remembered lessons with Ms. Cager as being independent exercises: “She would explain it to you and then she would put it on the board and then she would come back to you after she had been to all the other grades.”<sup>59</sup>

Just as the teacher’s labors were spread thin across seven grades, Fazendeville School, like almost all black schools in rural Louisiana, was severely underfunded and had few resources available. Rev. Bush recalls “our books was old books that the white children had used. Our new desks was old desks that the white children had used.”<sup>60</sup> The school itself occupied not a formal schoolhouse but a community-owned multipurpose hall as late as 1945.<sup>61</sup> Although there was a high school available in Violet, eight miles downriver, it was a challenge to get to. Like most black children at the time, students of Fazendeville had more limited education options than their white counterparts. Although most of the community had some elementary or middle school education, few went on to an education higher than the Village provided, illustrated in Figure 3.5.

But through the education pathways that the community provided, the narrative on education in Fazendeville diverted from the dominant narrative. According to the 1940 census,

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<sup>57</sup> Wilma Bush Sargent, interview by Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, La., February 6, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Morris Williams, interview by Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, La., April 4, 2002.

<sup>59</sup> Wilma Bush Sargent, oral history interview, New Orleans, La., February 6, 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Rev. Theodore Bush, interview by Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, April 13, 2002.

<sup>61</sup> It is unclear exactly when the Fazendeville School vacated Progressive Hall and took up a more permanent and dedicated structure. Residents recalled their classes in Progressive Hall as late as the mid-1940s, but by 1963 land records show the St. Bernard Parish School Board as a landowner in the Village.

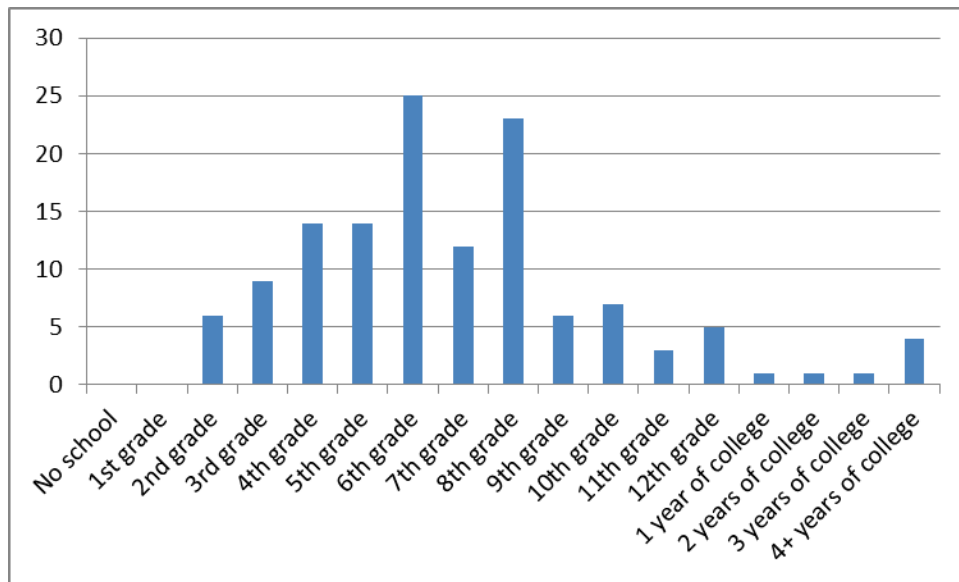


Figure 3.5: Graph of highest education levels achieved by Fazendeville residents, 1940<sup>62</sup>

the largest concentration of African Americans in Louisiana, 40.2 percent, had no higher than a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education, with the percentage of people having a higher level of education than that dropping off quickly. Few African Americans in Louisiana had higher than an elementary school education, and fewer still went on to high school or college. In Fazendeville, however, with the community school going up to eighth grade, approximately the same number of residents had completed Middle School as completed only elementary school, indicating much greater pathways for education in the Village. The narrative on education in Fazendeville was much more similar to that of St. Bernard Parish residents broadly (white and black) than African Americans across Louisiana, illustrated in Figure 3.6. Although a larger percentage of St. Bernard Parish residents had continued on to high school after completing middle school than Fazendeville residents, the Village saw a smaller percentage of people with no formal education,

<sup>62</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United State: 1940* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942).



a smaller percentage of people dropping out of elementary and middle school, and approximately the same percentage of students continuing on to a college education.<sup>63</sup>

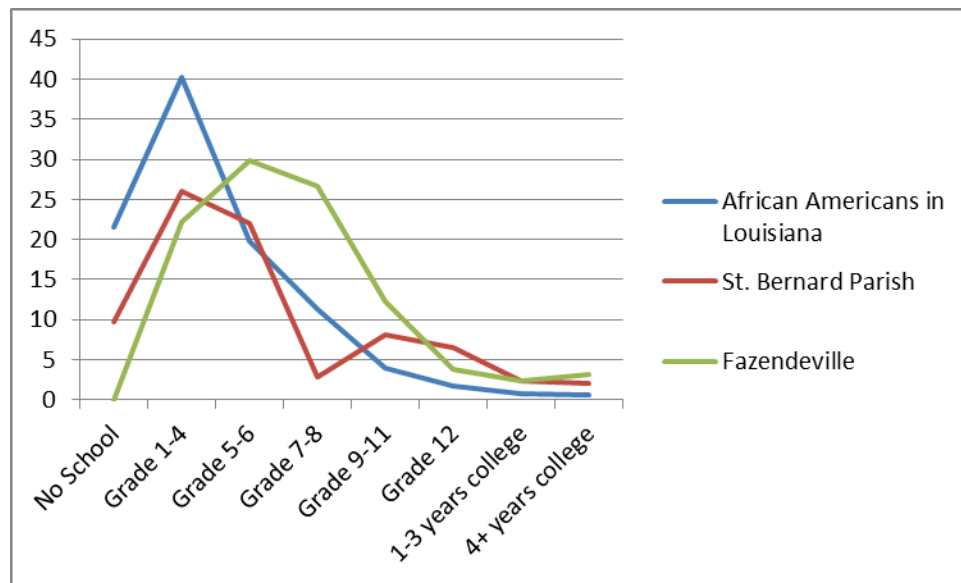


Figure 3.6: Percentage of residents' highest education level, 1940<sup>64</sup>

Fazendeville remained largely forgotten and ignored by white supremacists and philanthropists alike through the 1930s. But there was one white man that the Villagers had all too much contact with: Lyle K. Linch, challenging the desire to self-segregate and brining conflict with race and integration literally to the residents' front porches.

With Fazendeville sandwiched between Chalmette Monument and Chalmette National Cemetery, and as superintendent of Chalmette National Historical Park, Linch was doomed to have an awkward relationship with the residents of Fazendeville. However his particular characteristics made the interactions especially difficult. Rev. Theodore Bush recalls Superintendent Linch belittling the Fazendeville residents and treating them with disdain, demanding half of the pecans that they harvested from the trees around their homes. However, the residents didn't stand for this terrorizing and would openly mock and taunt him. Bush

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

recollects “my grandmother would say... you bastard you better get away from here if you know what’s good for you.” Generally, both adults and children “let Lynch know that he did not rule anyone in the village.” Frustrated with this, one day Lynch took a Fazendeville boy to scold and “he picked up a little negro boy and he did not put him the back seat, he put the boy in the trunk of his car.”<sup>65</sup> Lynch used whiteness as a weapon, exercising his power in meaningless ways, just to demonstrate his authority and reaffirm the inferior and ultimately helpless position of Fazendeville.

This outrageous behavior set Lynch apart as a man much worse than other white authority figures. Rev. Bush recalls, “Deputies and no one else come to the village and run over the negroes. They were respected.”<sup>66</sup> This behavior seemed to have been typical for Lynch, however. In his previous position as Superintendent of Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota,<sup>67</sup> Lynch had a record for exceeding “the bounds of acceptable decorum for agency personnel” according to a 1950 “confidential memorandum” from the Acting Regional Director.<sup>68</sup> Although extreme in his behavior to the Fazendeville residents and brushed off by them, Lynch was in a position of great political influence and would not disappear so easily.

The St. Bernard parish government and the National Park Service had been interested in acquiring the land that Fazendeville was settled on for years, but it wasn’t until 1963 that this interest turned into action. With the sesquicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans approaching and more money and influence than they ever had before as authorized by Congress, the

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<sup>65</sup> Rev. Theodore Bush, oral history interview, New Orleans, La., April 13, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Frequently moving around the country for another job is an exceptionally common part of the work culture of the National Park Service. Although Lynch was reassigned to Chalmette Battlefield from Pipestone National Monument, this is not necessarily indicative of a disciplinary action.

<sup>68</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Managing the Sacred and the Secular: An administrative history of Pipestone National Monument*, by Hal K. Rothman and Daniel J. Holder, MWR-1-0015-002, “Chapter IV: ‘This National Park Service Outpost’ 1938-1956,” [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/pipe/adhi4.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/pipe/adhi4.htm).

government began the process of acquiring the Fazendeville properties.<sup>69</sup> A series of letters from the summer of 1963 between Lynch and his delegate, P.O. McCormick and the National Park Service Southeast Regional Director, Chief of Lands C.J. Harriman chronicle the efforts to remove what Lynch dismisses as “our colored neighbors,”<sup>70</sup> one letter pictured in Figure 3.7.

Chalmette National Historical Park  
Box 125, Arabi, Louisiana

Llh25                                  June 18, 1963

Memorandum

To:            Regional Director  
                Attention: Chief of Lands

From:        Superintendent, Chalmette

Subject:     Fazendeville

Attached is a self-explanatory letter received today from the Pastor and Deacons of the Battle Ground Baptist Church.

You will be interested to know our colored neighbors chipped in to accumulate a fund of \$25.00 and had negro integrationist lawyer Touro out Wednesday night of last week for a public meeting in the Benevolent Hall. James Lawrence told Lawrence Page that Touro told the assembly they had better cooperate if prices were near reasonable, that it was futile to buck the Government when it was set on an improvement project.

I talked with Superintendent Joe Davies regarding school lots and he said the board had our offer under advisement and he expected them to accept as soon as they were certain we really intended to clear out the village.

I have had several contacts with the assorted Colombes and believe we are gaining ground.

Lyle K. Lynch  
Superintendent

Figure 3.7: Letter from Chalmette Battlefield superintendent, 1963<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Congress approved the establishment of a “sesquicentennial commission for the celebration of the Battle of New Orleans, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to acquire certain properties within Chalmette National Historical Park,” on October 9, 1962 (76 Stat. 755). This provided funding for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and granted the National Park Service the authority to go ahead with land acquisitions under the auspices of eminent domain.

<sup>70</sup> Lyle K. Lynch to C.J. Harriman, 18 June 18 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. These unpublished letters are in the archives of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in New Orleans, Louisiana. I am indebted to curator Kathy Lang for her assistance in introducing me to this resource as well as filtering through them.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

The park had some trouble tracking down landowners who had moved on, but began the process of offering around \$10,000 for each lot in exchange for signing it over to the government.<sup>72</sup> A sample letter is pictured in Figure 3.8. As the park was successful in purchasing

Chalmette National Historical Park  
Box 125 Arabi, Louisiana

L 1425                      May 30, 1963

Samuel Spann, President  
Progressive Mutual Aid Benevolent Association  
2024 Ursline  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Dear Mr. Spann:

As you may know, Public Law 87-759 (76 Stat. 755) approved by the Congress October 9, 1962 authorized the Secretary of the Interior to acquire certain lands known locally as Fazendeville for addition to Chalmette National Historical Park.

The title and appraisal studies have been completed and we are now in the process of purchasing the land. The public land records show that the association in 1884 purchased Lot 13, measuring 40 by 120 feet.

I am authorized to offer \$5,200 for the lot and improvements, subject to the sufficiency of your title being approved by the Department of Justice. If you prefer to retain the improvements and move them to a new location, you may do so, in which case the offer would be reduced by \$400.

If this offer is satisfactory, please have both copies of the attached option signed by the proper association official(s), witnessed and return both copies to me. A copy of the approved contract will be returned to you.

It should be understood that this offer is made for negotiating purposes and that in the event of future litigation it may not be introduced as evidence in any court to the prejudice of the United States. We want to effect a friendly settlement of the purchase of the property and we gather that the association feels the same way about this.

No further action will be required on your part, if the option is accepted, until we get ready to exchange the deed for the check. The check should be available in about 3 months provided the title to the property is satisfactory to the Department of Justice.

Please use the enclosed envelope in returning the option to me.

Sincerely yours,

  
Lyle K. Lynch  
Superintendent

cc: RO

Figure 3.8: Sample Fazendeville acquisition option, 1963<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> P.O. McCormick to C.J. Harriman, 23 December 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. Compensation varied based on the lot's appraised value, and at what time the seller turned the property over. As time went on, the government began offering more money as an incentive.

land from former residents who had already moved on, pressure increased on families still living in the Village to sell their land as well.

Residents from the community felt pressure from the white government, afraid in a still segregated society of what the consequences of not cooperating would be. The residents sought the counsel of a lawyer who advised “they better cooperate if prices were near reasonable, that it was futile to buck the Government when it was set on an improvement project.”<sup>74</sup> Residents also received pressure from the community itself, some intent on staying and preserving the community, some interested in moving it somewhere else to avoid all of this strife that Fazendeville had for so long been devoid of. Lynch reported that the presentation of “options” to community members sparked a frenzy, receiving numerous phone inquiries from “very unhappy” residents demanding to know why they “had not received options like everyone else.”<sup>75</sup> Lynch attributed this to eagerness and greed, but undoubtedly anxiety factored in chiefly as well.

Finally there was also significant pressure from family members influencing both for and against selling. Some families, especially if the parents were old or deceased and the children moving on anyway, were keen on taking the buyout and the money. Others insisted on staying put and preserving the community that had nurtured them. P.O. McCormick reported family strife within the Elam family and an inability to reach a consensus on the fate of lot 11 (See Figure 3.9 for a map of Fazendeville lots). They had not signed the papers giving up the house, and the next day McCormick drove by to make another attempt at convincing them. He saw Lucille Ballard, the final holdout of the family, sitting on the front porch “sporting a beautiful black and green mouse over her left eye.” She promptly signed the papers when McCormick

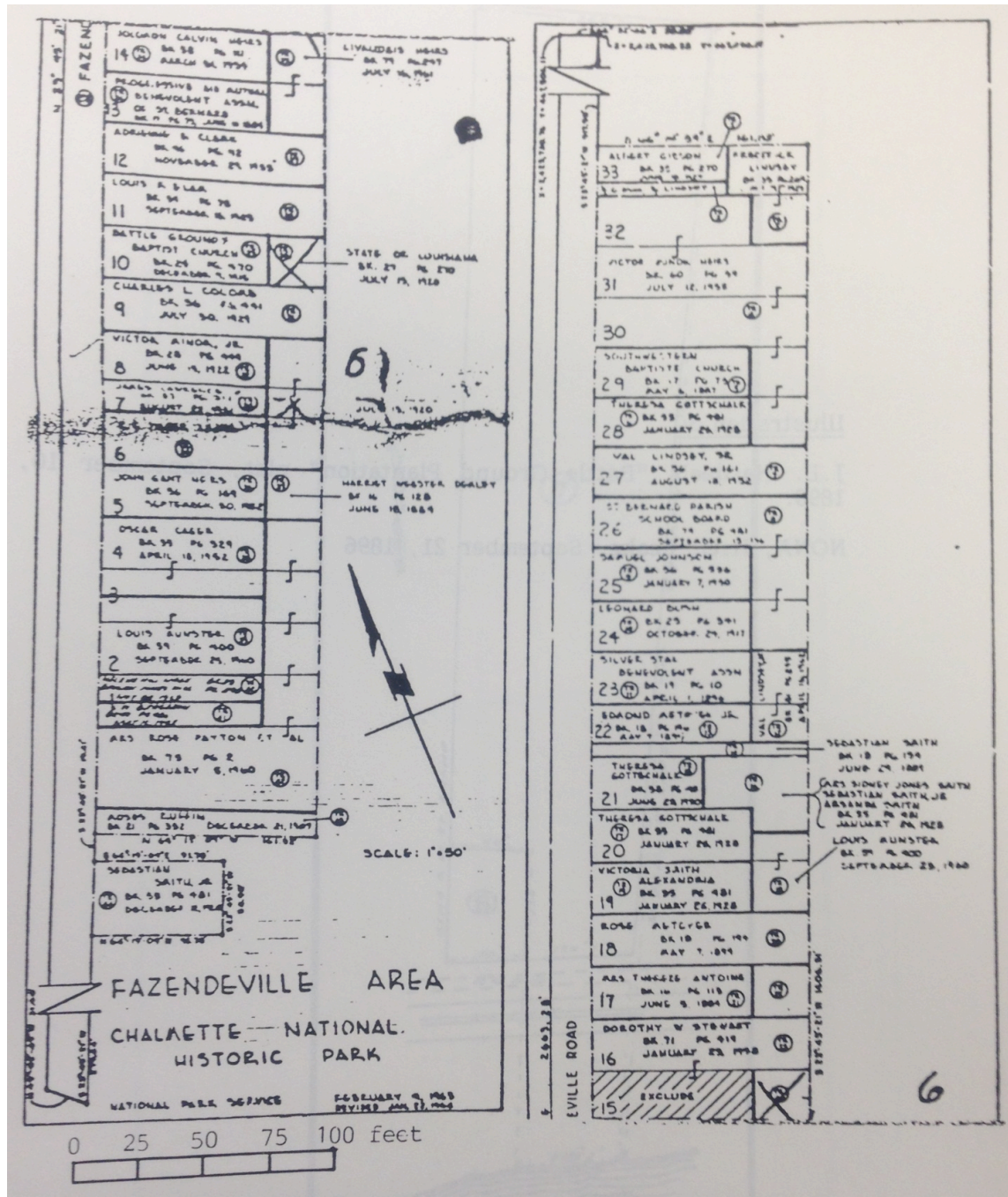
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<sup>73</sup> Lyle K. Lynch to Samuel Spaan, President, Progressive Mutual Aid Benevolent Association; 30 May 1963; Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

<sup>74</sup> Lyle K. Lynch to C.J. Harriman, 18 June 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

offered them.<sup>76</sup> Linch summarized that “uneasiness and fear of the unknown are the dominant emotion in Fazendeville tonight.”<sup>77</sup> Certainly Lucille Ballard and whoever gave her the black eye would have agreed.



<sup>76</sup> P.O. McCormick to C.J. Harriman, 8 August 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

<sup>77</sup> Lyle K. Linch to C.J. Harriman, 31 July 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

As residents slowly turned properties over to the government, the social institutions began to follow. The St. Bernard Parish school board declared their intention to sell “as soon as they were certain [the park] really intended to clear out the village.”<sup>79</sup> The Silver Star Benevolent Association and the Southwest Baptist Church eventually signed as well, perhaps rationalizing that they could do little good in a town without residents.<sup>80</sup> The Minor, Colomb, and Johnson families eventually each acquiesced after months of negotiations and signed over the seven lots that they individually owned.<sup>81</sup> But other families including the Bush family who owned several lots starkly refused to leave. McCormick reported to the regional office that the Bush family remained “belligerent and uncooperative” in the negotiations,<sup>82</sup> refusing to acquiesce to white authority.

However, ultimately Lynch’s omen proved correct and the efforts of the Villagers to stay were futile. By the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1965, the park was moderately successfully in their attempt to restore the battlefield to its 1815 appearance at the expense of the Fazendeville community. At that point few physical structures remained of the historic battlefield and were actively reconstructed to redevelop an historic appearance. The same time as Fazendeville was being pulled down, a rampart wall was being reconstructed, a canal dug and a screen of trees planted blocking the battlefield from highway 46. A few lonely structures remained from Fazendeville during the sesquicentennial, but they would shortly be taken down. Besides the Fazendeville homes, a smokestack from Kaiser Aluminum plant and several other anachronisms from the Port of St. Bernard freckled the battlefield and its skyline. The plain would have been vaguely familiar to a soldier reanimated from 1815. But devoid of the

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<sup>78</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

<sup>79</sup> Lyle K. Lynch to C.J. Harriman, 18 June 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

<sup>80</sup> Lyle K. Lynch to C.J. Harriman, 31 July 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

<sup>81</sup> Lyle K. Lynch to C.J. Harriman, 17 October 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

<sup>82</sup> P.O. McCormick to C.J. Harriman, 23 December 1963, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

life of the Village, of the churches, of the Progressive Hall, of the school, and the shady pecan trees it was all but unrecognizable for the residents.

Wilma Bush Sargent reflected on this in her oral history interview with Dr. Joyce Jackson:

“But you know what they say, you can’t go back, you can’t go home again. I think if I had the chance, I’d move back there.”

“Yeah, it’s a beautiful place. I’ve been over there.”

“Yeah but I’ll tell you what. I went there one time and I just cried my eyes out the way they keep it.”<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the counternarrative of integration in New Orleans and Fazendeville was more progressive than the dominant narrative in the rest of the South throughout Reconstruction, the opposite was true during the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s. As other communities throughout the South slowly but surely integrated – willingly or not – white authority in New Orleans retrenched. The politicians, school board, and the vast majority of the white population fought integration vehemently and even fool heartedly, surely knowing its inevitability given cautionary tales such as Little Rock. This conscious rejection of the dominant narrative made a bold but confident assertion that things would be different in New Orleans. The same is true of Fazendeville. Instead of maintaining autonomy as a segregated community, presumably a desirable outcome and compromise given the white unwillingness to cohabitate demonstrated through the riots over school integration. Yet instead, the solution was dissolution – turning attention to the community of Fazenedville just long enough to pull it apart.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Wilma Bush Sargent, oral history interview, New Orleans, La., February 6, 2002.

<sup>84</sup> This is partially just bad timing and bad luck on the part of Fazendeville: had the Villave been located less prominently on the section of remaining battlefield, or more private landowners surrounding the plain refused to



This desegregation of the 1960s in New Orleans bears resemblance to Frantz Fanon's chronicles of decolonization in Africa and Latin America in the same period.<sup>85</sup> Fanon argued that since colonies – or this case, segregated societies – were only sustained by violence, fear and terror, the dissolution of the colonies would proceed in the same way. According to Fanon, there could be no other way *other* than the mass resistance to change exhibited by the white power. In turn, for the formerly colonized – the people of color of New Orleans – it is only through this revolution and complete upheaval that new opportunities and true equality can be born.

Blackness is rendered as “Other” in these models, further normalizing white hegemonic rule and affirming the property value of whiteness.<sup>86</sup> One extreme of this position is illustrated by the reluctant and conditional acceptance of integration in the public schools of New Orleans, where a small number of students were hand-picked to integrate who would best conform to white notions of acceptability and respectability rather than develop the most comprehensive and effective integration plan to maximize opportunities for black students. The onus is placed on black students to transform to meet the needs of a white community and white schools rather than adapting the schools to serve a diverse population equally. In this posture, education was used as a tool of oppression, to further reinforce dominant knowledge and white social superiority over black and emphasize a racial divide. Even throughout Jim Crow, with black schools and communities largely ignored by the white establishment, there was less emphasis put on blackness.<sup>87</sup> Now race was at the forefront, even more key an identification element than ever before, and impossible to ignore. When black students were suddenly encompassed into the

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sell, or the big anniversary not so well-organized or funded, this might not have happened as it did. However, we cannot call it a coincidence – the black race of the Villagers was a primary factor in rationalizing its destruction.

<sup>85</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

<sup>86</sup> Ladson-Billings, “They’re Trying to Wash us Away,” xiii.

<sup>87</sup> Certainly if a black student tried to attend a white school, people would have noticed. But in “keeping their heads down,” little attention was paid.

existing white education system, instead of adapting the system to be more inclusive, the black students were forced to become more white in order to succeed.<sup>88</sup>

The other extreme of this position is seen at Fazendeville, where the needs of the black community were ignored and justified against because they rubbed against a Common Good defined by the socially dominant white community. The role that this community played within a broader society and consideration for compromise were not even addressed. Some of the Fazendeville residents were interested in taking the government's offer, others were coerced, and still others simply couldn't envision a world where they would stand up against the white authoritative machine when it bore down so keenly against them. Those holdouts, continuing in a long local black protest tradition and rebelling against white authority, were marginalized.

Yet in establishing this otherness, the real legacy – that which is still a painful albatross – is a dominant narrative largely devoid of our shared history, and a lack of consciousness of how significantly this misshapen identity has stunted a broad social development.<sup>89</sup> Curriculum theorist William Pinar argues for the need to appreciate shared history: “Americans cannot hope to understand themselves unless they are knowledgeable and knowing of those they have constructed as ‘different,’ as ‘other.’”<sup>90</sup> Segregated schools are key to normalizing this inequality and to further embracing a divisive and damaging racial dichotomy. This narrative of race-based inequality is accepted as “a function of historical oppression, shared experience, and present

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<sup>88</sup> This is one reason why many black parents initially opposed desegregation: because of the perception that forcing black students to attend white educational institutions would dilute black culture, black identity, and black community. It wasn't until it became painfully clear that separate would always mean unequal did the paradigm shift among black parents to largely support integration.

<sup>89</sup> To quote Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* from April 16, 1963: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”

<sup>90</sup> William F. Pinar et al., *Understanding Curriculum: an introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 330.

inequality,”<sup>91</sup> yet represents only the dominant narrative on race and integration rather than any kind of immutable truth.

Fazendeville resident Shirley M. Lyons, born in the Village in 1924, reflected on what constituted value in the eyes of Whites in an oral history interview with Dr. Jackson. She reflected on the cemetery where Fazendeville residents were buried, a few miles away:

“They let us keep it because its around all white people. And it... how you would say...”

“Historical?”

“Yeah, that’s it. And that’s why they let us keep it.”<sup>92</sup>

This perspective of historical value, directly connected to whiteness and its property value, has been the hallmark of oppression well before and well after the 1960s and is a primary contributor to constructions of dominant narratives. The periods throughout New Orleans and Fazendeville history where this commonly accepted tenet is challenged divert from the dominant narrative. When this oppressive and hegemonic ideology gains prominence, the narratives converge.

The 1961-62 school year started off only slightly more smoothly than the 1960-61 school year, with riots and protests still common. In the second year of integration, New Orleans schools saw a total of 13 black students in otherwise white schools, still an only nominal figure. By the following year, the courts had to formally forbid the elaborate aptitude test process black students had to pass in order to be granted a transfer into a white school.<sup>93</sup> As integration moved

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<sup>91</sup> L. Gunnier, “Groups, Representation, and Race-Conscious Districting: a case of the emperor’s clothes,” in K. Crenshaw et al., ed.s, *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement* (New York: the New Press, 1995), 218.

<sup>92</sup> Shirley M. Lyons, interviewed by Joyce Jackson, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans, La., April 5, 2002.

<sup>93</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 252.

ahead, the white population took the ultimate step in rejecting this advancement – leaving the public school system and largely excusing themselves from addressing integration.

Following the integration movement of the 1960s, angry and defiantly opposed, the white population of New Orleans, and especially the Ninth Ward, began a steady migration to the nearby suburbs of Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes. They brought with them money, political influence, and to some extent the quality schools. By 1970, the black population of New Orleans was only a slight minority with schools declining in funding and quality. By 1980, New Orleans was a majority black city, poor and with a tragically poor system of education. Once again there were black schools in New Orleans, not officially, yet undeniably. Ultimately, the paradise of equality and harmony – the happy ending to this requiem – proved elusive still.

#### **IV. Dona eis requiem**

Gonna sit me down and rest awhile  
When my good Lord calls me<sup>1</sup>

They have a chance to create a phenomenal school district. Long way to go, but that city was not serious about its education. Those children were being desperately underserved prior. And the amount of progress and the amount of reform we're seeing in a short amount of time has been absolutely amazing. I have so much respect for the adults, the teachers, the principals that are working hard.<sup>2</sup>

#### **It was an Ordinary Day in New Orleans...**

Simone is a third grader at Benjamin Mays Prep, a poorly performing Recovery School District charter school near her home in an Upper Ninth Ward housing project. She lives with her four brothers and her grandmother. Simone's mother, a heroin addict, regularly moves between jail and rehabilitation centers. Just last week, she was arrested for selling drugs in the neighborhood near the school. Like many of Simone's classmates, she hasn't seen her father in years.

Simone is a smart girl, but she has severe untreated ADHD that prevents her from concentrating. Her grandmother cares about Simone and wants to help her excel, but with four other boys constantly in trouble, she has neither the time nor the resources to devote to getting Simone treatment, or to paying much attention to her at all. Simone often brings these frustrations to school, and has been known to act out violently and impulsively.

The school year is almost over, and Simone's grandmother wants her to apply to Lusher, one of the "good" Orleans Parish School Board charters on the other side of town. But without any help to get Simone to an admissions interview, or work on the application, it is unlikely that

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<sup>1</sup> This is a traditional spiritual with uncertain origins.

<sup>2</sup> Arne Duncan, interview by Roland Martin, *Washington Watch with Roland Martin*, TVOne, 31 January 2010.

Simone would get in. In a few years, she will most likely end up at George Washington Carver High School, the community school “of last resort” widely considered to be one of the worst schools in the city, if not the country.

Simone’s teacher, like many teachers in her school, is a Teach for America placement with no prior teaching experience. Ms. Smith is a young white woman, who studied art at a liberal arts college in the northeast. She wanted to teach in an “inner-city” elementary school because she felt students didn’t have opportunities to learn about culture and art since many low-income city schools don’t have resources to support these programs. Ms. Smith believes that every student deserves the chance to be treated equally, and that every day starts off with a clean slate – there are no favorites, no accommodations, and no excuses; every student is treated the same and is subject to the same high expectations.

One day in class, Ms. Smith had the students painting a large mural honoring Black History Month. Simone was particularly antsy today, as her mother was being sentenced for her arrest last week. She waved around a paintbrush as she fidgeted with a shoelace, accidentally flicking purple paint onto a classmate.

“Hey!” Tre’Jean yelled.

“What’s your problem?” Simone asked.

“You got paint on me!” he responded, wiping it from his impeccable uniform shirt.

“So?” Simone asked as she shoved Tre’Jean backwards.

Ms. Smith saw this out of the corner of her eye, grabbed the paintbrush from Simone, and sent her to the principal’s office. “Please don’t be a detention,” she thought. Ms. Smith might believe in clean slates, but Principal Gardner didn’t. One more detention would mean a two day suspension for Simone.

## Waiting for a Savior

There is a proverb that states, “it is always darkest before the dawn.” Perhaps this is applicable to the integrated schools of New Orleans; for now, the situation is bleak, but this requiem holds on to optimism for the possibilities of the future. Like confronting death, confronting the present state of New Orleans schools is troubling and requires strength and hope to face. The schools are struggling, sputtering, failing, and despite recent efforts and opportunities to improve, remain steadfastly low-quality and indeed segregated. In a requiem, congregants beg for respite from suffering and for forgiveness from sins, knowing the end is near. The narrative of integration in New Orleans takes a similar turn. The dominant narrative on integration suggests it is a finite and completed process, that we live in an integrated, post-racial society. But the reality of New Orleans proves otherwise.

By 2005, the public schools of New Orleans were underfunded, underperforming, and generally among the worst in the nation. They boasted above-average classroom sizes, below-average test scores, and one of the highest teacher turnover rates in the country. Many schools lacked such basic amenities as textbooks, desks, or soap dispensers in the bathrooms.<sup>3</sup> The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) began taking over the worst of the worst in New Orleans in an attempt to turn these schools around. In the middle of this renewed effort to mitigate one disaster came another, in the shape of Hurricane Katrina. Flood water inundated 85 percent of the city, including nearly 100 percent of the lowest income areas with the poorest performing schools. Residents, even those brave or foolish enough to ride out the storm, were quickly scattered all over the country, unsure how, unsure if they could ever return. The situation in New Orleans was bad, but Katrina managed to make it worse. This nadir removed almost all

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<sup>3</sup> Rodney Washington, Tenette Smith, Brenda Jones and Henry Robinson, Jr., “Hurricane Katrina Three Years Later: implications of race, poverty and equity on the restructuring of the New Orleans public school system,” *Researcher: an interdisciplinary journal* 22/1 (2008): 11-12.

schools from local control and placed them in the hands of the state, leaving students, parents, teachers and administrators with few options other than prayer.

August 29, 2005 has become a line dividing time in New Orleans into “before” and “after.” Like every other aspect of life in the city, Katrina ensured that in her wake nothing would ever be the same again. But in her eye wall, educators and policy makers – especially Secretary of Education Arne Duncan – saw a silver lining. Rather than retrofit failing schools one by one, New Orleans would have the chance – the rare, bittersweet chance that only a disaster of such magnitude affords – to rebuild from the ground up.

It is now 145 years after the constitution required integrated schools, 59 years after *Brown* required integrated schools, and eight years after Katrina required the schools to start from scratch. In 1991, Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon wrote in the introduction to their survey of New Orleans education, *Crescent City Schools*, that the public schools face “an awesome challenge” to manage quality schools which are “underfunded and filled with the society’s poorest children.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, 22 years and one education revolution later we are facing the same challenges and asking ourselves the exact same questions.

A quick look at New Orleans today, especially its public schools, questions whether integration occurred at all. Race issues and tensions continue to mount, and both neighborhoods and schools are firmly segregated – by experience, preference and price tag, even if no longer by law. Since the 1960s, the population of New Orleans has steadily darkened. As more white families move to the nearby suburbs of Jefferson and St. Bernard Parishes to escape the perceived threats of a blackening city, the black population has been concentrated, resulting today in a city about 60 percent black. This is reflected even more sharply in the system of public education, theoretically serving all, but realistically serving only those without better options.

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<sup>4</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 1.



Residential segregation and poverty are key contributors to this cycle,<sup>5</sup> maintaining a segregated school system, and rendering “further progress in implementing *Brown* nearly impossible.”<sup>6</sup>

Figure 4.1 demonstrates the stubborn segregation of New Orleans public schools.

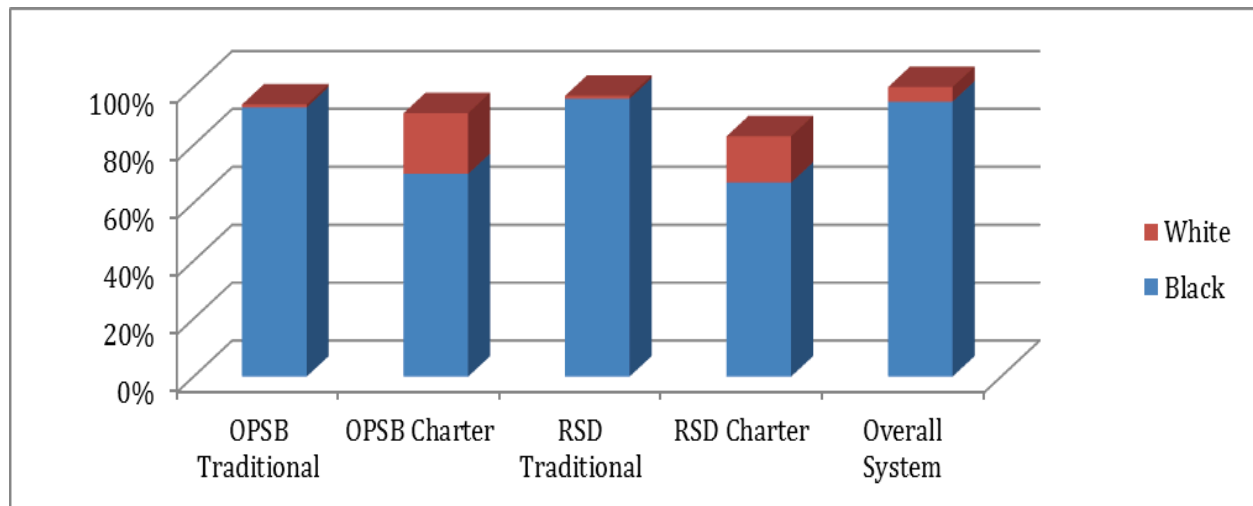


Figure 4.1: Racial makeup of New Orleans public schools by school type, 2009<sup>7</sup>

More than ever before, the public schools of New Orleans are not representative of the population of New Orleans. They are much poorer, much darker, and much more segregated than this already poor, black, bifurcated city. Although 60 percent of the population of New Orleans is black,<sup>8</sup> an astounding 90 percent of students in the public schools are.<sup>9</sup> There is an obsession with studying the negative correlation between large black and low-income populations and poor achievement test scores and school performance as a “deficiency model” or “achievement gap.” These phrases help to define and illustrate the troubling reality that white students constantly outperform black students on standardized tests, among other educational metrics. There is no

<sup>5</sup> Ladson-Billings, “From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt,” 4.

<sup>6</sup> Derrick A. Bell, Jr., “*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma,” in K. Crenshaw et al., ed.s, *Critical Race Theory: Key writings that formed the movement* (New York: the New Press, 1995), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, “The State of Public Schools in New Orleans Post-Katrina,” 38.

<sup>8</sup> Louisiana State Census Data Center, “Demographics and Census Geography,” 2010, [http://louisiana.gov/Explore/Demographics\\_and\\_Geography/](http://louisiana.gov/Explore/Demographics_and_Geography/).

<sup>9</sup> Tulane University, the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Tulane University, 2012), 2.

denying that the schools in New Orleans are unequal, and race is at the core of this. While disconcerting that 97 percent of schools are segregated,<sup>10</sup> more troubling is the stark inequality that exists within these informally segregated schools, drawn chiefly along racial lines.

In 2009, only about 50 percent of public school students passed standardized achievement tests. By 2012, this figured had climbed to only 59 percent.<sup>11</sup> Other useful metrics to assess school quality are School Performance Scores (SPS), a figure from 0 to 200 associated with a letter grade issued to schools annually by the Louisiana Department of Education to rank school performance. In addition to achievement test scores, it also considers dropout rates, attendance rates and attrition in evaluating school performance. However, these scores are not distributed across all schools in New Orleans evenly.

There are three different authorities governing the public schools in New Orleans: the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) which oversees eight traditionally-run schools and 11 charter schools, the Recovery School District (RSD) which oversees 17 traditional schools and 50 charter schools, and BESE which directly oversees five charter schools.<sup>12</sup> OPSB and BESE schools, especially the charter schools, are commonly understood to be the best and most desirable – evidenced by their higher test scores, better supplemental funding, superior attendance rates and high SPS.<sup>13</sup>

The schools with the highest SPS in the city in 2011 were OPSB charter schools, averaging an SPS level equivalent to an “A” ranking. After those were the OPSB traditional

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>12</sup> RSD and BESE schools are run by the Louisiana state department of education, with OPSB schools run at the local level. The RSD school system developed shortly *before* Hurricane Katrina in response to the abhorrent public schools of New Orleans, yet the system was dramatically extended in the post-storm cleanup and rebuild effort.

<sup>13</sup> It is beyond the scope of this examination to engage in a lengthy discussion on the benefits and drawbacks of charter schools. In the interest of acknowledging bias, be it known to the reader that I generally do not support the charter school movement because of its tendency to concentrate the easiest-to-educate and abandon the neediest in an effort to demonstrate quick and artificial progress.

schools, in the “B” range. BESE schools were a close second, with the highest-performing school in the “B” range, and otherwise with a “C” average. The RSD charters managed an average SPS of 77.5, a “D,” just slightly above the “fail” threshold of 75, with the highest five performing schools ranking closely with the highest-performing OPSB traditional schools. However, the RSD traditional schools had an “F” average SPS of 55.1, with only two schools in the district above the 75 point fail threshold, and even then only barely.<sup>14</sup> ACT scores among New Orleans Public School students show nearly identical trends – the OPSB charters have the highest average of 20.3, OPSB traditional school and RSD charter schools are comparable with scores of 17 and 17.5, respectively, and RSD traditional schools come in last place with an average of only 15.3.<sup>15</sup>

There are many other statistics demonstrating the academic superiority and therefore desirability of the OPSB schools. These schools paid teachers better than others in New Orleans, and slightly higher than other Louisiana schools, although still well below the U.S. average. This allows OPSB to easily recruit and attract the best teachers in the region, and also maintains lower turnover rates.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, OPSB schools have the highest percentage of teachers in the city with 20 or more years of experience – more than 34 percent in 2011.

More than 50 percent of OPSB teachers had 10 or more years of experience. Conversely, only about 30 percent of RSD teachers had more than 10 years of experience. Paying less for positions in underfunded, underperforming schools typically located in the worst neighborhoods in the city, RSD schools cannot attract teachers easily and rely heavily on placement programs such as Teach for America to fill their rosters. Although providing short-term staffing relief,

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<sup>14</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 38-41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 22.

these placements do not offer long-term development opportunities for the school community.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, in 2011 first-year teachers made up 22 percent of the RSD workforce, and 42 percent had less than three years of experience. Meanwhile, only 28 percent of teachers at OPSB schools had fewer than three years of experience in 2011.<sup>18</sup> (See Figure 4.2)

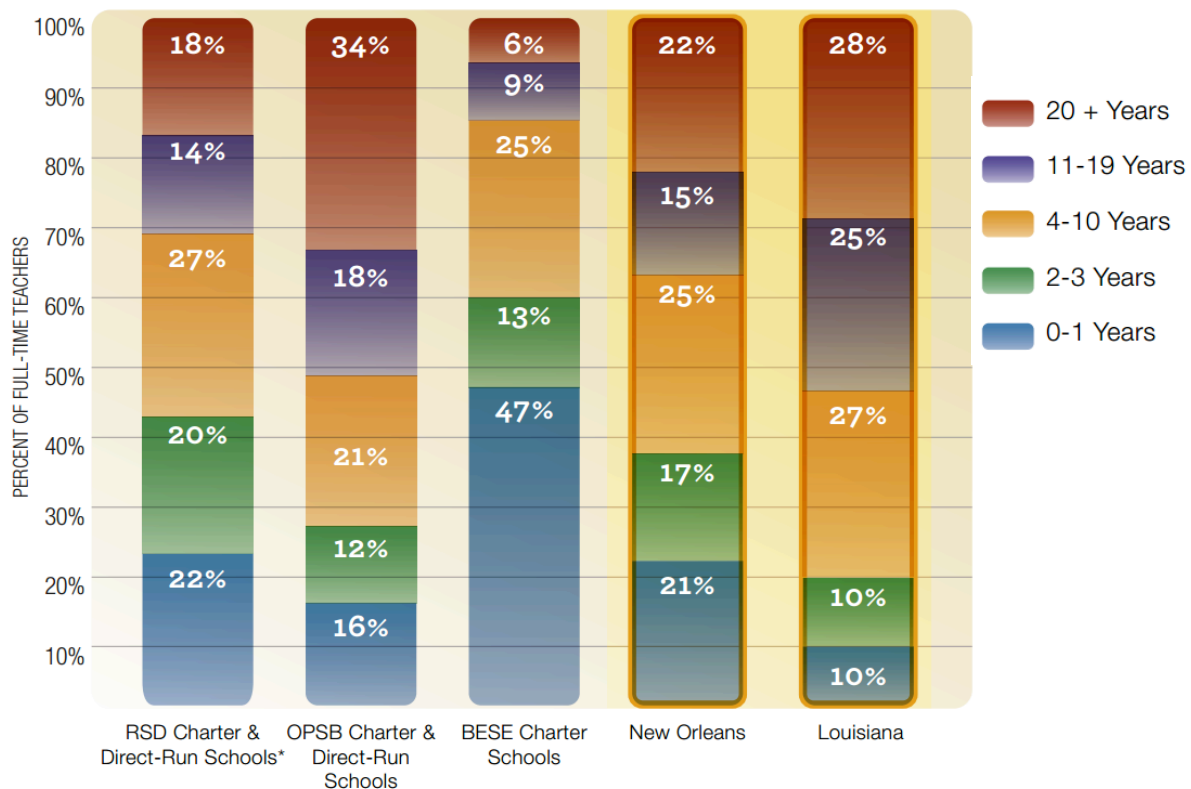


Figure 4.2: Teacher experience in New Orleans by school type, 2010 - 2011<sup>19</sup>

Although limited in resources, New Orleans is not completely without good schools. One in particular – Benjamin Franklin High School, a gifted magnet OPSB charter school – is ranked

<sup>17</sup> Lesli A. Maxwell, "As Year Ends, Questions Remain for New Orleans," *Education Week* 27/39 (2008): 1-13. It is beyond the scope of this research to engage in a lengthy discussion on the merits/ drawbacks of programs like TFA. I generally oppose programs like this for the high turnover rate they bring to already unstable education environments, believing instead teachers should be involved and most of all invested in a community in order to foster long-term and meaningful growth and development. Empowering community members and allowing a community to educate itself, an education model that dates all the way back to the Freedman's Bureau is a better investment than TFA.

<sup>18</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

among the best public high schools in the United States. But the few quality schools are the exception. There are only five “A” rated schools by SPS standards in New Orleans, all OPSB charters.<sup>20</sup> Although they represent among the best schools in the state, they are neighbors to schools ranked not only worst in the state, but among the worst in the nation.<sup>21</sup> Whereas 82 percent of students in OPSB schools scored at least “basic” on LEAP assessment testing in 2012, only 51 percent of students in RSD schools did.<sup>22</sup>

But just as the “good” schools are not distributed evenly among school districts, neither are the black and low-income students. There is a strong negative correlation between the percent of students who score well on achievement tests and the percent of students who are black, and a very strong correlation between the percent of students who are black and the percentage of students who are low-income. In New Orleans, the more low-income students a school has, the more likely it is to have a large black population, and the more black and low-income students a school has, the more likely it is to have a low SPS.<sup>23</sup>

There have been many short-term solutions intended to magnanimously level the field for black students and give them advantages that circumstance has precluded: including bussing students to better schools in more affluent neighborhoods and affirmative action plans to ensure diversity in higher education. However, providing equal access and truly ensuring equality bear little resemblance.<sup>24</sup> Short-term solutions for individual students ultimately do little to address “the long-term underlying problems,”<sup>25</sup> and do little to prepare a student with the tools needed to excel academically. Tara Yosso argues, “indeed, one of the most prevalent forms of

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<sup>20</sup> These are Audubon Charter, Lake Forest Elementary, Lusher, Warren Easton High School and Benjamin Franklin High School.

<sup>21</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 38-40.

<sup>24</sup> Bell, “Serving Two Masters,” 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ladson-Billings, “From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt,” 4.

contemporary racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking.”<sup>26</sup> It is imperative to reconsider black students as more than “depraved, deficient, and deviant,” and respect them as equals.<sup>27</sup>

The public schools of New Orleans have made gains since 2005. In 2011, 66 percent of parents surveyed throughout the schools were better after Katrina, compared to 31 percent in 2009. Yet on the whole they remain among the worst in the nation.<sup>28</sup> They are a man-made disaster: the product of over a century of “deficit thinking” and restricting access to quality and equal education with a direct correlation to race.<sup>29</sup> And the numbers – especially of low-income stratification and racial segregation – remain largely unchanged since 2004, meaning the finger of damnation cannot be pointed to Katrina. Integration has failed of its own accord.

The architects of the school system – largely removed from the city, retrenched in Baton Rouge, and largely white, are part of this failure. The alphabet soup of school governance creates a tiered system benefitting students of higher socioeconomic status who can navigate the charter school system, and abandoning those who cannot. Increasing poverty is a growing problem: as the population of New Orleans grew between 2007 and 2013 as residents continue to return to the city following Katrina, the poverty rate also grew, from 18 percent before Katrina to a staggering 26 percent today. While about 34 percent of New Orleans residents are considered “low-income,” an astounding 85 percent of students in New Orleans public schools in 2012 were low-income.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Tara J. Yosso, “Whose Culture has Capital? A critical race theory discussion of community culture and wealth,” in A.D. Dixon and C.K. Rousseau, ed.s, *Critical Race Theory in Education: all God’s children got a song*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 173.

<sup>27</sup> Ladson-Billings, *The Dream Keepers: Successful teachers of African American children*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 4. Some of these gains can be attributed to an influx of money invested in the schools following Katrina, buoying school budgets which face challenges ahead to realize sustainable financial futures.

<sup>29</sup> Despite the fact that they are nominally integrated!

<sup>30</sup> “Poverty” and “low-income” have surprisingly amorphous definitions, depending not only on annual income, but also location and family size. For an average family in New Orleans (2.5 to 3 children), \$35,000 per year is the threshold for reduced-price lunch, and I use this figure to demarcate “low-income” throughout this research.

Like poor test scores, low-income students were also significantly concentrated in schools by school type. While OPSB traditional schools and RSD charter schools had approximately equal numbers of low-income students in 2012, the RSD traditional schools had an overwhelming 92 percent of students low-income, while BESE schools had only 72 percent of students low-income and OPSB charter schools a mere 59 percent.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, these numbers reflect a concentration of economic, social, and cultural assets in especially the OPSB charter schools, the product of selective admissions process and other methods of discrimination (see Figure 4.3) result in an effective concentration of wealth and other support resources for students. Poor-quality RSD schools are much easier to apply to than the elite OPSB schools. RSD schools have recently implemented a “OneApp” system where applicants fill out a single

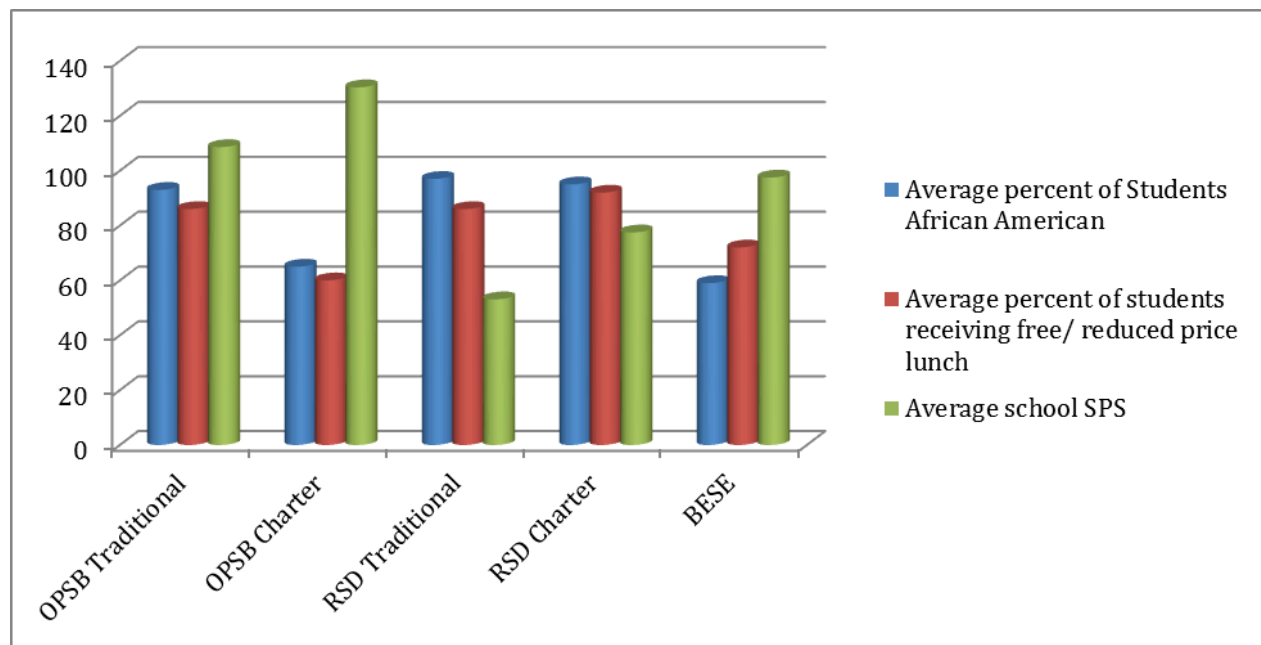


Figure 4.3: Race, performance and poverty in New Orleans by school type, 2010 - 2011<sup>32</sup>  
Uneven admissions requirements and processes among OPSB, BESE and RSD schools

<sup>31</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 38-40.

application, ranking their school choices. OPSB schools require separate applications and almost always interviews, privileging students with greater sociocultural resources and the luxury of parents with more disposable time and resources to research application processes and attend interviews and orientations, giving value to whiteness and the property value it confers.<sup>33</sup> Parents who aren't aware of the OPSB choices, have limited resources to find or fill out applications, or who can't visit the schools because of financial or time constraints, are filtered out immediately. Consequently, OPSB charters and other schools with lower poverty and higher achievement artificially concentrate the "easiest-to-educate" students most likely to excel academically, filtering out those who have less apparent academic potential and thumbing the scale of academic success toward the already privileged, and students who are white or "pass" for white through achievement in a white-defined system of educational merit.<sup>34</sup> These "good schools" remain good, with high SPS rates (see Figure 4.4) and high test scores among students. The bad schools have no respite.

Even the ostensibly blind and fair lottery admissions system implemented by some but not all of the New Orleans charter schools<sup>35</sup> still leaves ample opportunity for discrimination against low-income families and especially single working parents through admissions and expulsion policies. At admissions interviews and informational sessions, teachers and administrators can discourage, even if not formally prohibit parents from applying if they will be unable to assist in extracurricular and enrichment classroom activities because of work or family obligations. After acceptance, a student can be expelled if parents do not satisfy required

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>34</sup> In the Reconstruction period, "passing" for white could be achieved through affluence and social position, but more commonly was achieved through the literal whitening of skin through generations of procreating and associating with whiteness. Today, "passing" for white is no less real, but has little to do with outward appearance, and much more to do with social behavior and adhesion to white social and cultural norms.

<sup>35</sup> RSD charter schools have an application and then a lottery while OPSB schools have a competitive, ranked admissions process.



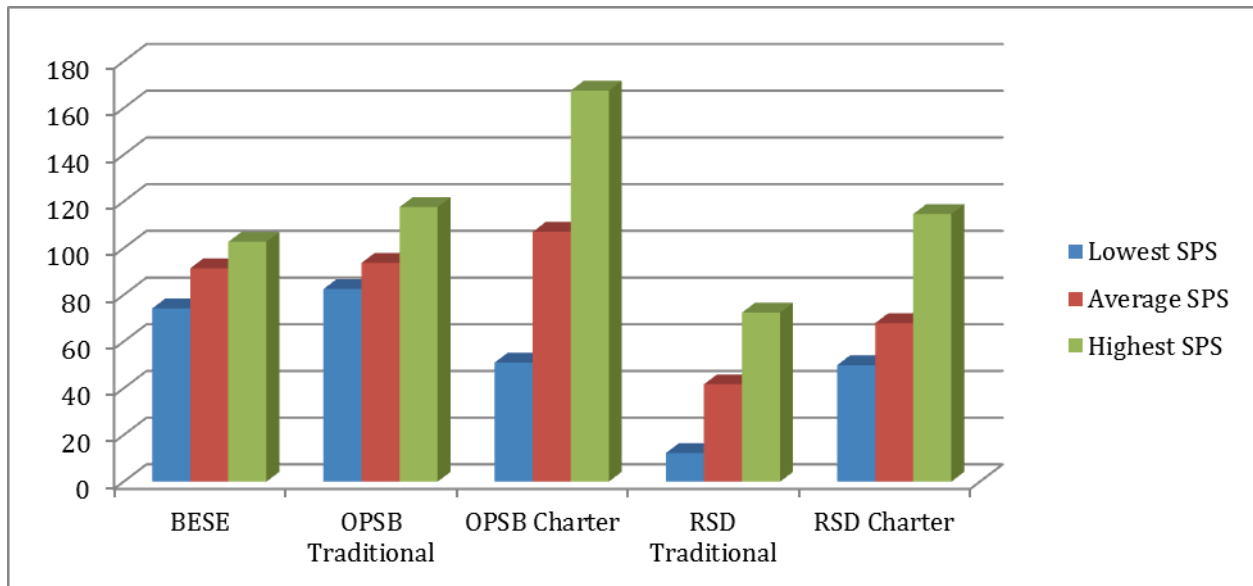


Figure 4.4: School performance scores in New Orleans by school type, 2010-2011.<sup>36</sup>

volunteer hours, or if a student's performance slips because they lack study and homework support at home, or if they act out at school because of much deeper troubles plaguing their family lives. Students like Simone are virtually guaranteed to not get in such a school at all, or if she were to manage admissions, would likely not stay long. This system gives heavy privilege to students with parents with flexible schedules and free time to devote to volunteering in the classroom. It is not nefarious of schools to want dedicated, involved parents who can contribute temporally and financially to their resource-scarce operations, but these policies effectively if perhaps not intentionally discriminate against black students, giving further value and privilege to whiteness and exacerbate rather than placate a system of segregation.

Even in establishing schools, community and school boards can exercise significant influence in the kinds of families and students they attract through strategic geographic placement. New charter schools tend to open in more affluent neighborhoods near existing private schools to try and draw from the local community resources. Meanwhile, students living

<sup>36</sup> Tulane University, *The State of New Orleans Public Schools*, 38-40.

further away, in less affluent neighborhoods and with greater needs for these resources, are left with less ability to access them.<sup>37</sup> Although RSD’s “OneApp” system provides greater pathways for school choice, including applying for several schools across the city, 68 percent of applications in 2011 listed only one school. This could be due to a lack of awareness of other options among parents or conversely conviction about which schools they want their child to attend, but much more likely due to geographic limitations.

In 2011, just 13 percent of students attended a school in the neighborhood in which they resided.<sup>38</sup> Although RSD charter applications give slight preference to students “districted” locally,<sup>39</sup> most parents would prefer a better school over a closer school. The most requested schools on the RSD “OneApp” were *not* the highest ranking RSD schools, reflecting parents trying to strike a balance between quality and locality. Unfortunately, especially for families living in low-income areas, they can’t have both. In a 2011 survey of parents, 82 percent agreed that it was important for children to attend a school in their community. However, only 27 percent reported their child’s school within one mile of home.<sup>40</sup> Although distance from home was reported as a mitigating factor for only 36 percent of parents due to school bus transportation and public bus and streetcar service available throughout much of the city, it has significant repercussions for parents themselves – especially working and single parents.<sup>41</sup> A school on the other side of town can mean less availability for parents to be involved in classroom activities or to meet with teachers. The parents most disabled to provide the support resources required for

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<sup>37</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> The city is split into six districts, roughly: Gentilly and New Orleans East; Tremé, Bywater, Upper and Lower Ninth Wards; CPD, Upper and Lower Garden Districts and Uptown; Mid-City and Lakeview; Algiers

<sup>40</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

students to excel are further limited by a lack of quality, local schools, where supply falls well short of demand.

The trap that this system creates localizes wealth and performance in the same elite schools. Indeed, of the five “A” rated public schools in New Orleans, three of them have the lowest percentage of low-income students in the city.<sup>42</sup> Areas with higher poverty concentrations also concentrate the poorer performing schools. Along with less funding and fewer veteran teachers, these schools also tend to offer more limited curricula, offering fewer challenges and fewer enrichment opportunities.<sup>43</sup> And so, in this system, being poor allows for only a poor-quality education. A poor-quality education contributes to higher school dropout rates, lower college attendance rates, fewer professional options, lower paying employment, and a much greater risk as an adult of being poor and raising children into poverty. Many of the schools in these low-income communities become schools of last resort, “widely understood by local residents to be a ‘dumping ground’ where students are placed when they cannot find the resources to gain admission at one of the city’s choice charter schools.”<sup>44</sup> The cycle continues.<sup>45</sup>

However, tied into this downward spiral where poverty and low performance are linked, emerges the issue of race. There is a strong negative correlation between percentage of black students in a school and school SPS, illustrated in Figure 4.5. In New Orleans today, the whiter the school, the better it is. There is significant inequality along racial lines – and despite a century of working against it, firm segregation. In Orleans Parish, 97 percent of schools were segregated as of 2009.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Michna, “Stories at the Center: circles, educational organizing, and the fate of neighborhood public schools in New Orleans,” *American Quarterly* 61/3 (2009): 535.

<sup>45</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, 18.

Race is intertwined with poverty and low performance in the New Orleans public schools because virtually all of the non-white segregated schools are high-poverty.<sup>47</sup> A scatterplot of

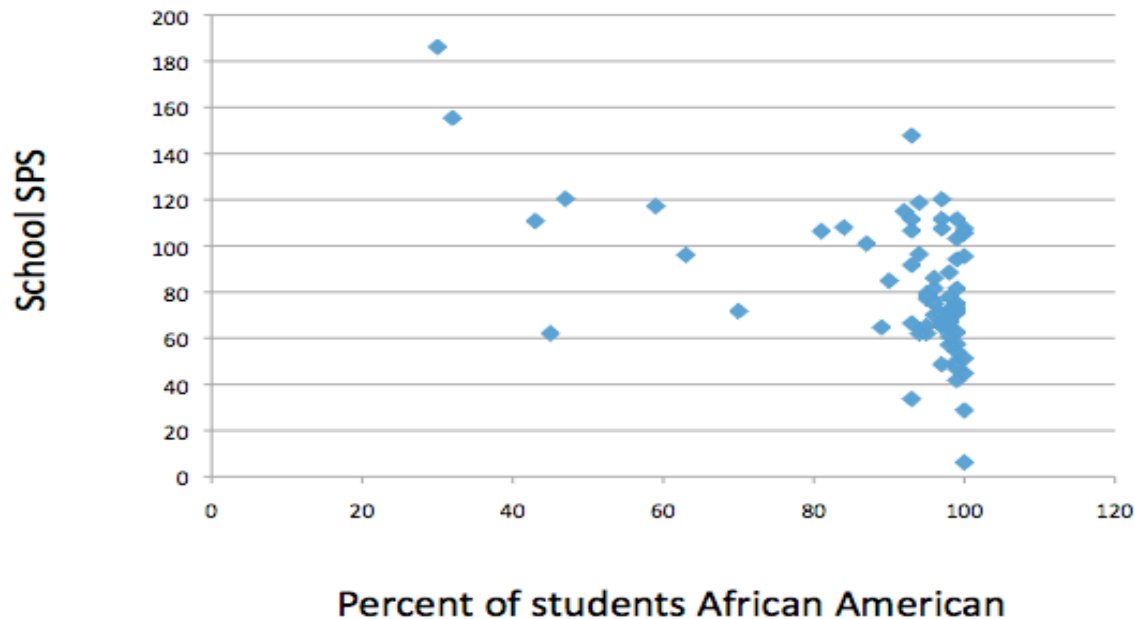


Figure 4.5: Correlation between race and school performance in New Orleans schools, 2010<sup>48</sup>

average percent of students African American and average percent of students receiving free or reduced price lunch at public schools in New Orleans shows a very strong positive correlation between race and poverty, illustrated in Figure 4.6. In the predominantly black schools across the city, 68 percent of students were low-income, compared to 34 percent of the integrated schools. A black student was 3.5 times more likely in 2009 to attend a very high poverty school in New Orleans than a white student. Just as the OPSB and BESE charter schools had fewer low-income

<sup>47</sup> This research defines “high poverty” as a school where 40 percent or more of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and “very high poverty” as a school where 75 percent or more students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

<sup>48</sup> Tulane University, “The State of Public Education in New Orleans,” 38-40. This data shows a Pearson r correlation value of -0.53, indicating a strong negative correlation between race and school performance.

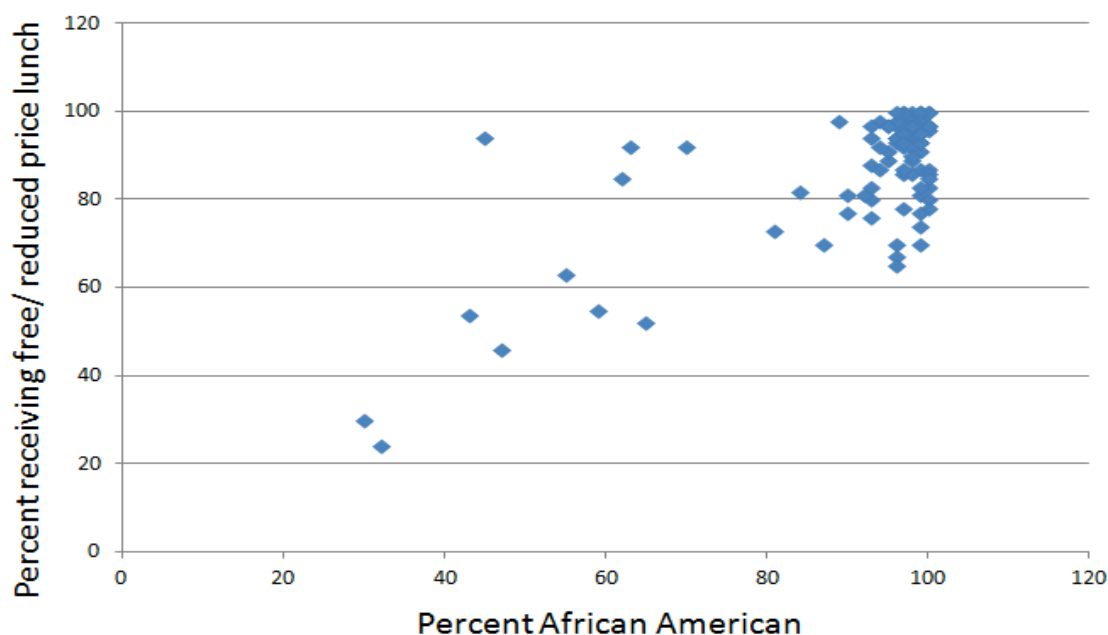


Figure 4.6: Correlation between race and poverty in New Orleans schools, 2010<sup>49</sup>

students than other city schools, they also had fewer students of color. Whereas 90 percent of New Orleans public school students were black in 2012, BESE charter schools had only 59 percent of their students black, and OPSB charter schools had only a 65 percent black population<sup>50</sup> (See Figure 4.1). These 16 disproportionately white schools make up only 18 percent of the schools in New Orleans and served only 23 percent of the city’s students.<sup>51</sup> In fact, 67 percent of the total white population in the city attend just 4 schools, among the only “integrated” schools in the system.<sup>52</sup> Figure 4.7 shows a map illustrating the racial concentration of the New Orleans public schools.

<sup>49</sup> Tulane University, “The State of Public Education in New Orleans,” 38-40. This data shows a Pearson  $r$  correlation value of 0.71, indicating a very strong positive correlation between race and poverty.

<sup>50</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 15. Although BESE charter schools had the lowest percentage of black students in the city, they had the highest percentage of Hispanic students – more than twice the percentage of all other school types combined at 16 percent.

<sup>51</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 38-40.

<sup>52</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, 39.

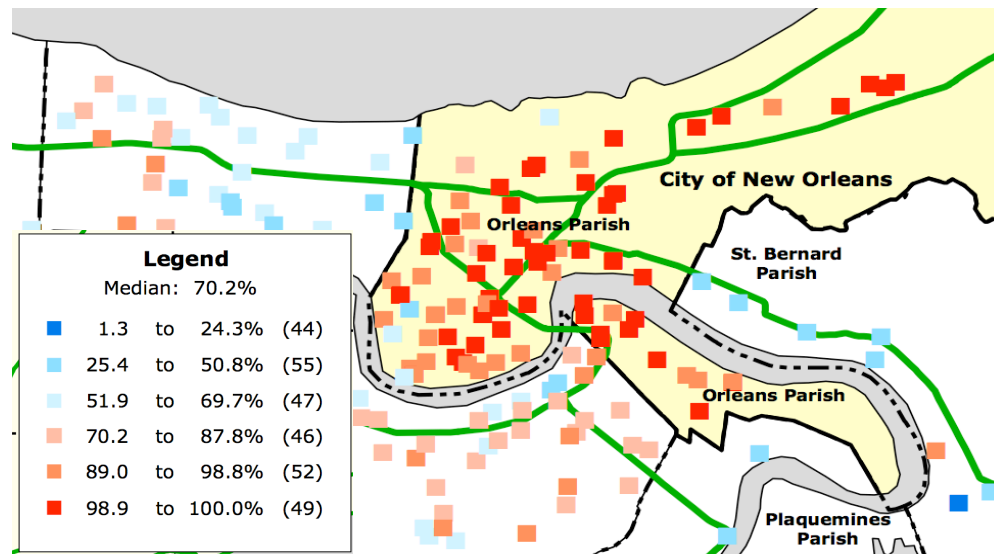


Figure 4.7: Degree of racial concentration in New Orleans area schools, 2009<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, only 18 percent of black students attend these “good” OPSB and BESE schools, meaning a black student is nearly 7 times more likely to attend a failing RSD school than a white student.<sup>54</sup> As a result, the RSD schools become the “schools of last resort,” concentrating the poorest students with the fewest academic resources outside of the classrooms in the schools least able because of poor testing to get funding or recruit good teachers.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the greatest and most troubling statistic of inequality seen in looking at New Orleans public school graduates eligible for TOPS, a scholarship program available to Louisiana high school students who attend a Louisiana university or junior college. The scholarship levels increase with merit, but basic qualification requires a 2.5 cumulative high school GPA and a minimum ACT score of 17 for junior college and 20 for a university. While 54 percent of OPSB charter graduates qualified for TOPS in 2011, this number steadily declines across other school types. Only 38 percent of OPSB traditional school graduates and 29 percent of RSD charter

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 4.

school graduates qualified for this scholarship assistance, and a mere 14 percent of RSD traditional school graduates did.<sup>56</sup>

These numbers encapsulate the destructive and segregated cycle of inequality that embroils the education system of New Orleans as a product of over a century of disadvantage for black students. The OPSB students who are most likely to be able to afford college are also most likely to receive a state-funded scholarship to support their attendance. This will help ensure that these students are successful in college, and later in better-paying careers that require a college education. These educational opportunities afforded by the property value of whiteness will be passed on to their children, also likely to follow in the same path. But for a likely black and low-income RSD traditional school graduate with every socioeconomic card already being played against him or her, who is very unlikely to have the money or support resources required to go to college, gets little help. Unable to afford a higher education, even students who qualified for college would have a hard time finding the money to make that dream a reality. Instead, they attend a trade school, or perhaps receive no degree at all. They go on to lower-wage positions, have children who cannot qualify for better schools, and who are caught in the inescapable wheel of poverty and poor education that their parents were.

With dismal realities such as these, how can it ever be argued that integration was successful? Today, the education system itself maintains a troubling and self-perpetuating posture of segregation – by practice, even if no longer by law. This reality bears no resemblance whatsoever to a dominant narrative declaring integration a success and celebrating the demise of inequality through integrated public schools. This cyclical narrative of success and subsequent failure of integration must be broken if the narrative of integration in New Orleans is ever to proceed, and a greater truth of equality be realized.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 31.

### **Meanwhile, in the Village...**

The wind whips across a bare field, swaying the knee-high grass. An egret lazily wades through a shallow pool that has formed by rain the night before. In the distance a car slowly circumnavigates the field, its occupants stopping for a photograph and then continuing on their journey. The battlefield shows few signs that it ever nurtured a town, and indeed it is not difficult to visit and learn nothing of Fazendeville at all.

The only physical structures that remain of the Village are a faint scar that runs through the middle of the battlefield where Fazende's Lane was once laid, and a lonely informational sign on the tour loop road. Some visitors eager to learn a tale of military might stop and dutifully read it, as do some curious locals who jog the track on weekends and evenings after work, and the occasional visitor pointed there by a knowledgeable ranger. But mostly, when Fazendeville is mentioned it is greeted with blank stares. Today, Fazendeville only exists as a memory in the minds of those lived there, and a mythical place to their descendents, reared on stories of the community. Most others will never know the Village, reducing its experiences of perseverance, pride and community to wisps of historical memory.

### **Significance in Absence**

The narrative of Fazendeville has already expired. When the road was closed and the houses were torn down, its slow dirge began (See Figure 4.8). In this stage of its requiem, we are in a sad state of mourning for its loss. There is no chapter in the Louisiana state history textbook





Figure 4.8: *St. Bernard Voice*; November 27, 1964<sup>57</sup>

on Fazendeville. There is no day in the curriculum dedicated to its story. This is no crime – after all, it is a small story of a small community in a small corner of the state. Yet this is the very first step toward forgetting. With no one left to tell the stories and practice the traditions, they are sure to be lost. It is only through a conscious effort not only of remembering, but of teaching and encouraging remembrance that these memories and legacies live on. Certainly not every story, not all history, can be remembered. But the surest way to erase the past, to pretend a moment

<sup>57</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

never existed, is by not teaching of it to a younger generation. And so teachers of history face difficult choices, with difficult consequences.

Informing these choices is a process of evaluating historical importance. If not everything can be covered, then what is taught and what gets left out? Even at the battlefield where Fazendeville was located, we who are entrusted as stewards of this culture and this history, tasked with impressing the importance of these places on adults and children alike do not tell of this story. Privileged instead is the more obvious, more nationally-relevant story of the battle.

But in evaluating these choices, in asking what should be taught, in assessing whose history is taught and valued and why, we must never forget the underlying issues of race. There is an adage loosely attributed to Winston Churchill that says history is written by the victors. It is only partially true: history is written by the dominant. There is always a tendency to among the recorders and storytellers of history to locate themselves. What stories have most shaped our own experiences? Which are the most relevant epochs that help contextualize our life today? Identifying ourselves by gender, by nationality, by locality, by ethnicity, by race and then finding the closest match as idols, role models and perhaps cautionary tales, is a natural reaction in combing through historical discourses, leaving the rest as foil characters in an epic saga.<sup>58</sup>

In an American society, with dominant understandings of race as bifurcated, and a dominant understanding of race as one of the most fundamental and immutable of these identifiers, race rises to the top in directing and influencing a historical narrative. And so, especially for a white student in a predominantly white setting, it challenges normative ideologies to see a black figure or learn about an episode of black history and find a direct personal connection. It simply is not a thought that is for most conceptualized.

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<sup>58</sup> Andrews, "Exploring Cross-Cultural Boundaries," 507.

One of the most common and socially-preferred methods of combating deficit thinking is through a “colorblind” or “integrationalist” ideology which rejects race consciousness and prejudice with “reason and neutrality.”<sup>59</sup> This model criticizes race as “just another example of the range of arbitrary social characteristics – like gender, physical handicap, or sexual preference – that right-thinking people should learn to ignore.” But this dismissal of race, while well-intentioned, has “a distinctly white, upper-middle-class, and Protestant flavor” designed to assuage the guilt felt by Whites who continually if unconsciously oppress Blacks.<sup>60</sup>

Rather than seeking to understand the historical and cultural factors which have contributed to the development of an oppressive racist ideology and asking the cognitively uncomfortable question of how white property value exacerbates this, colorblindness simply ignores this rhetoric altogether.<sup>61</sup> To claim colorblindness is to deny the ideological difference that exists between oppressor and oppressed, locating the “problem” of otherness in the minority rather than realizing the mutuality of shared experience.

Contrasting against “colorblindness” is providing “different” treatment based on race. There is a fine line between accommodationism and cultural sensitivity, but being aware and attuned to how races shapes worldview is not a racist posture. Equality does not necessarily demand equal treatment, as the needs, interests and performance abilities of students vary for complex and race-unrelated reasons. Under even ideal situations, race matters and must not be rendered invisible.<sup>62</sup>

To ignore the important cultures, histories, people and stories that have constructed the consciousnesses and realities that we experience today does an injustice not only to their memory

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<sup>59</sup> G. Peller, “Race-Consciousness,” in K. Crenshaw et al., ed.s, *Critical Race Theory: Key writings that formed the movement*, (New York: the New Press, 1995), 127.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ladson-Billings, “They’re Trying to Wash us Away,” vi.

and their experience, but also we who live in their shadow. Acknowledging race, and especially acknowledging the history tied into it that leads us into the present is critical. But shining a light on a topic that in a modern post-Civil rights era is somewhat taboo can be difficult, especially for Whites. It is easy and comfortable for Whites to simply shrug with simple restrictionist assertion “I don’t discriminate against race!” and are therefore not part of the problem. But this perspective can be analogized as missing the forest through the trees: failing to acknowledge the power that sociocultural dominance holds renders this position illogical.<sup>63</sup> Charles Lawrence implements a more effective metaphor, reminding that racism is “both a crime and a disease ... [which] infects almost everyone...But the diagnosis is difficult, because our own contamination with the very illness for white a cure is sought impairs our comprehension of the disorder.”<sup>64</sup>

The price of this choice to be blind to the role of race in this discourse in the interest of sensitivity is the development of teachers less able to meet the needs of diverse students and the creation of students less able to understand themselves. Without being exposed to lessons like Fazendeville, taught expressly to engage the racial experiences of diverse students, these stories are forgotten and become someone else’s history. An artificial racial divide is maintained rather than challenged, and questions of identity, shared history and experience go unasked.

The mutually destructive quality of racism creates a synchrony of “discrimination, and subjugations work[ing] in concert, not in isolation.”<sup>65</sup> For children, especially those in the diverse cultural environment of New Orleans, failure to appreciate the indelible mark of white culture on black and black on white deforms both equally.<sup>66</sup> The need to reconceptualize this

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<sup>63</sup> Fasching-Varner, “No! the team ain’t alright!” 822.

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence III, “The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection,” 237.

<sup>65</sup> Fasching-Varner, “No! the team ain’t alright!” 822.

<sup>66</sup> William Pinar et al., *Understanding Curriculum*, 330.

system is paramount. Integration is a means to an end, and opening doors for disenfranchised students is a positive step, but for true equality to be achieved, a further step is necessary.

## **Conclusion**

The current narrative on integration in New Orleans diverges yet again from the dominant narrative. Unlike demonstrating a positive progression from inequality and segregation to equality and integration, the narrative demonstrates yet another chapter of a cyclical story. The present state of New Orleans public schools – poor in quality and performance, concentrating wealth and inequality, and steadfastly segregated – do not reflect over a century of efforts to integrate, and fail to meet the most basic educational needs of the community they serve. What results is a mass exodus of resources: as soon as a parent has the financial ability to pull their child out of the public schools and send them to superior private and Catholic schools competing for affluent families, they do. This has cemented race with wealth and quality of education, further reinforcing a cycle of inequality and making it increasingly impossible to break free.

A simple solution to integrating the schools within these parameters would be to invest in them, to improve them and make them attractive to black and white families of moderate resources who are perhaps able to afford parochial schools, but aren't necessarily dedicated to sending their children there. Chartering schools and developing "elite" strata of public schools attractive to these families of higher socioeconomic means is one way that this is being achieved. But as this research has demonstrated, although this tiered system makes public education more attractive for some who would otherwise defer to private education, for the most part it abandons a large section of the community who are left with no other options.

Focusing on the easy-to-educate as low-hanging fruit, charter schools have been the first attempt at turning around the public schools. They are hailed by many as a solution for improved transparency and accountability, increasing in number every year since 2007. In 2011, 78 percent of New Orleans public school students attended a charter school, by far the highest proportion of any city in the United States.<sup>67</sup> In 2011, the RSD announced that nine of the remaining 16 direct-run schools would be phased out or chartered by 2013 – all of which were identified as failing or under-enrolled. Indeed it is much easier to close a failing charter than a failing traditional school, but charters do not necessarily prevent failure in the first place.

The result of emphasizing a system of charters does nothing to distribute the quality of schools more evenly and nothing to empower the community. Indeed, many charters are granted to large national education groups that can more easily demonstrate results in improved test scores and other metrics through the example of other schools under their control.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, large-scale charter school systems tend to be better funded and better organized than local groups without specialized experience in school start-up, administration, or fundraising. This makes large charter school systems more attractive to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), a national advisory board which researches and ranks prospective charter applicants. BESE relies almost exclusively on NACSA rankings in making decisions on granting charters for BESE and RSD schools. Although in 2012 the Louisiana Department of Education revised their procedures to include providing local context and local consultants to the NACSA to help in their rankings, local needs, local culture and a pedagogy of cultural and community

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<sup>67</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 12. The city with the next highest proportion of students in charter schools is Washington, D.C., well known in recent years for centering its academic revival around the charter school movement. Even then, only 39 percent of Washington students attend charter schools.

<sup>68</sup> Although these schools and their successes often occur in different schools in different regions facing different education challenges and climates.

relevancy are undervalued and underappreciated.<sup>69</sup> The biggest challenges of pervasive, race-based inequality and segregation are not addressed, and a defunct status quo is maintained.

Since Reconstruction, New Orleans has had an elite white population divorced from the realities of social life and an impoverished black population. Over a century of education has done nothing to solve this. Through a lack of consideration for the tenacity of inequity exercised by the public school system, these neediest students with the fewest resources available to them outside of the school were concentrated, with less money, fewer tax dollars to support education, and less and less support coming from policy makers. And as this research has demonstrated, poor-quality education is a self-replicating cycle. Community members often live in the same neighborhoods as their parents and grandparents did growing up, sending their children to the same poor schools, receiving the same poor education. Many critics argue along the lines that, “the citizens many of them educated by the same system, had become accustomed to substandard test scores, substandard teaching, substandard facilities, and the substandard administration of the school system.”<sup>70</sup> But as this research shows, that perspective denies the role of race in integration to subvert black advancement. And so, the cycle continues.

This current solution is the product not only of centuries of race and class biases, but also of remote policy makers with limited understanding of the nuances and realities of the educational climate of New Orleans. The BESE (and its subdivision, the RSD) oversee 31,000 New Orleans public school students, approximately 74 percent of the public school population. These boards are primarily based out of Baton Rouge, 80 miles away.<sup>71</sup> Although RSD was

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<sup>69</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 12. OPSB takes a different approach, considering NACSA recommendations but ultimately granting charters through an independent vote.

<sup>70</sup> Maria Alexander, “Reinventing a Broken Wheel?: the fight to reclaim public education in New Orleans,” *Social Policy* 37/3 (2007): 18.

<sup>71</sup> In 2011, a satellite RSD office was established in New Orleans in responding to complaints from local parents of a lack of local control, but its role and influence are minimal compared to the Baton Rouge-based decision making.

established as a temporary governing body, the process of transitioning back to local OPSB control is undefined.<sup>72</sup>

Distant policy makers lack appreciation for this destructive manmade cycle. Without support or correction, the gap widens, and the children who most need support are abandoned because of an inability to demonstrate progress through test metrics. This embodies Gloria Ladson-Billings concept of the “education debt.”<sup>73</sup> Although these neediest students are not shortchanged simply because they are black, the correlation is obvious and impossible to ignore.

Racism and racist practices in education, whether intentional or unintentional, destroy communities of all colors, and stunt our development as a society. As long as there is a color barrier and such a thing as “bad schools” in New Orleans, neither the city nor its people will ever be able to live up to their potential. The current solution has been to start with the upper-middle class through chartering, and presumably work down from them. Although indeed you need to start somewhere, this approach simply gives those who already have a head start a further head start. The “hardest-to-educate” students – the ones with learning disabilities, who act out, who don’t have the support at home they need to excel academically, who struggle to connect to the lessons of their curriculum are set aside, with a promise that they will be returned for. There is no justice in this approach, and this is not a sustainable solution to the academic crisis New Orleans faces. And so, I argue, the time for mourning must pass. If the attempts at integration have failed, let them fail, and their place let a new reality be ushered in.

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<sup>72</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Ladson-Billings, “From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt.”



## V. In paradisum

If you get there before I do,  
Comin' for to carry me home,  
Tell all my friends I'm comin' too,  
Comin' for to carry me home.<sup>1</sup>

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check – a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.<sup>2</sup>

### It is an Ordinary Day in New Orleans...

Students mill around the cafeteria, eating a communal breakfast as they wait for the day to begin. Mealtime is community time at the Amistad School. Most students qualify for free breakfast and lunch, but even those who don't donate a little to the meal fund so they don't get left out of this important daily ritual. The noise of upbeat drumming erupts from the loudspeaker, as students discard banana peels and yogurt spoons and migrate to a circle in the middle of the room. Students sway to the music, some dashing into the circle for a brief dance solo before being edged out by another student seeking the limelight. Students call out resolutions over the crescendo: "I'm going to pass my math test today!" "I'm going to be nice to my sister!"

The drumming fades, and Principal Stevens stands in the center of the circle. "Good morning, scholars!" he chimes. "This morning, our story is about a boy who didn't study for a test." A wave of arms shoot into the air as students groan and wiggle, hoping to grab Mr. Stevens' eye and be selected as the reader. "Today is a very special day. Thommanika turns 7 today, so it is her turn to read." A shy first-grader squeals as she dashes inside the circle to take the book.

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<sup>1</sup> Wallis Willis; *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, c. 1860.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream" (speech, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963, National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>).

The Amistad School is all about community and stewardship, teaching students to love learning and even more importantly to love helping other people learn. It is a district school that draws the best teachers from all over the city, dedicated to the students of its local community – the Lower Ninth Ward. Although the school and the community are comprised of a majority of black students, each class, and now even each section of the neighborhood, has a spattering of white faces as more new families are moving in, attracted by low housing costs, ample green space, community gardens and a burgeoning tradition of excellent schools.

The curriculum of Amistad School reflects an interpretation of the core curriculum. It represents a gumbo of culture, history and tradition, where broader lessons in topics as diverse as United States history and geometry are all connected back to the unique people, culture, and traditions of New Orleans, and especially the African American community of the Ninth Ward. A social studies lesson on the American colonies and the Revolutionary War is sure to mention the role that slaves and free people of color played in this story, and what was happening in New Orleans at the time. A science lesson on weather examines the structure of a hurricane. This curriculum celebrates the culture and lived experience of the students and their community, encouraging students not just to see themselves in their lessons, but to bring those lessons back into the community and apply their knowledge in the world they encounter every day.

### **A Hope in Possibility**

The critical element to a requiem is that it suggests life does not end in death, it continues into an afterlife more perfect than any possible reality on Earth. This narrative suggests death is not only inevitable, it is necessary to bring about a greater truth, and the only pathway to the

ideal. And so, this requiem concludes not in mourning the failures of integration, but in celebrating the opportunities that its expiration allows.

When we make this transition into the ideal constructions of race and schools, in New Orleans, the possibilities are endless. Although the Amistad School is part of this idealizing vision and currently does not exist, there is no reason why it couldn't. The vision of a community-oriented school that celebrates and centralizes culture and race is entirely possible, and indeed would be a natural development to be born from the experience of New Orleans. From its earliest colonial days, New Orleans developed a proud tradition of figuring things out on its own.<sup>3</sup> Today, among a people accustomed to and unafraid of rebuilding, such a challenge of completely reconceptualizing education is entirely possible, and indeed must be attempted if the narrative on integration is to change from how it has played out before. In a city that holds community sacred and where culture bubbles up from the streets, this culture and race-centric<sup>4</sup> vision is tantalizingly near.

Although there is no reason New Orleans *couldn't* innovate a race-centric, integrated and high-quality school system like the prospective Amistad School, there are concrete reasons why it hasn't. For over a century, the schools of New Orleans have struggled to achieve a similar goal: emerging integrated following a period of social upheaval. Although for most schools in the South this emergence of integration came only as a part of the civil rights movement following *Brown*<sup>5</sup> in 1954, in New Orleans the conversation has been taking place for generations. This narrative of integration has not been a simple and straightforward one. It has

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<sup>3</sup> Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French colonial New Orleans*.

<sup>4</sup> I define a "race-centric" vision for education as a curriculum putting an emphasis on racial and cultural uniqueness, and using racial diversity to inform and inspire the development of curriculum rather than politely ignoring it, which so often is the approach taken today. In this race-centric vision, instead of pretending race is not a factor and is not noticed, culture and heritage is singled out and celebrated as often as possible.

<sup>5</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*; 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

been complicated and cyclical, with periods of successes and periods of failures, with the same cycle of struggle continuing today.

A dominant narrative suggests we live in an integrated, post-racist society, existing as the logical conclusion in a linear and successful progression of equity through integrated schools extending from *Brown*. But the reality of schools in New Orleans proves otherwise. In 2013, the public schools of New Orleans are not representative of the ethnic diversity of the city, and do not show a successful progression from segregated to integrated. Indeed, despite 150 years of working to the contrary, these schools remain steadfastly segregated.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps most troubling about this segregation is that it is not simply a question of artificially concentrating race. Connected inextricably to racial segregation are gaps of stark wealth inequality correlated chiefly along racial lines.

This inequality is deeply rooted, established through the slave trade at the same time this nation innovated other essential institutions such as democracy and capitalism. But these institutions were built on the back of slave labor, cementing race, racism and the property value attributed to whiteness that this system has created at the center of American society and the American experience. Perpetuating this is a system of education further maintaining great inequality by requiring the skills afforded by white property value and cultural capital to excel. Poor performance is correlated along racial lines, creating a debt in achievement among minority students without access to the property value of whiteness and no pathway to acquiring it.<sup>7</sup> It is inarguable that this current system needs a concerted effort to ensure that integration in New Orleans is realized, calling into question the dominant narrative of integration as a binary, linear process and suggesting an alternate narrative.

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<sup>6</sup> Institute on Race and Poverty, *The State of Public Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans*.

<sup>7</sup> Ladson-Billings, "From the achievement gap to the education debt," 3-12.

The current failure of integration experienced in New Orleans is not the product of a lack of effort. Integration efforts of the past have been thorough, if not always executed in the most logical or ideal ways possible.<sup>8</sup> There was Reconstruction in the 1870s, Civil Rights and *Brown* in the 1950s and 1960s, even following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The hope was to use the disaster that had been weathered – whether it be slavery, Jim Crow or a hurricane – to reconceptualize, reimagine and reinvent a system of education like a phoenix from the ashes: better than ever before, once and for all integrated. Yet in all cases this attempt failed, leaving in its wake schools that remained steadfastly segregated.

In Reconstruction following the Civil War, the hope initially through the Freedman's Bureau and then as a state constitutional mandate for integrated schools, was to give truly equal opportunities to all students, regardless of race, as the nation struggled to realize a society of equality that the Founders had only been able to theorize. Principals, teachers, school boards and elected officials gathered to rethink the role that education would play in this new and exciting reality. Although the integrated schools were never widespread, they were successful. But neither this new Utopia following the Civil War nor the integrated schools that were born from it would last long. When Reconstruction ended and control reverted from Northern authorities back to local hands, the integrated schools shuttered. Parents, black and white, largely rejected integration in favor of segregated institutions, believing they could do a better job of ensuring access to high-quality education.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Although it could be argued that the integration attempt during the civil rights era in the 1960s was a hollow attempt to satisfy a court order without any real intention to develop integrated schools, this is not universally true, and does not apply to the integration attempts of Reconstruction or the current struggle.

<sup>9</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 272-3.

By the 1940s and 1950s, when it became apparent that separate but equal was yet another promise unfulfilled, the black community resuscitated the push for integration.<sup>10</sup> Emboldened by the Supreme Court and a corps of federal marshals, this push moved ahead in 1960 as two Ninth Ward elementary schools were tentatively integrated. Yet the attempt to integrate in 1960 was little more than a symbolic gesture, permitting a very small number of black students grudging access to white schools, but otherwise maintaining the status quo – hardly consistent with the dominant narrative of liberation.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, although more black students accessed schools formerly reserved for Whites, the overall number of white students attending Orleans Parish schools declined significantly. A combination of discomfort, fear and hate, coupled with a rising white middle class, sent thousands of white families fleeing from the increasingly diverse and integrated city to the quickly growing suburbs. After a generation of “white flight,” although the dominant narrative of increased black access to white schools remained applicable, the end result of almost exclusively black schools was certainly not the original intention. In the end, schools were still segregated: informally, yet undeniably (See Figure 5.1).

The example of New Orleans challenges the dominant narratives on integration both by extending the conversation from just a phenomenon of the 1960s and by identifying it as a pervasive social issue that has plagued New Orleans policy-makers and architects of the school system for generations. And despite years of trial-and-error, no escape from this cycle has yet been identified, laying waste to the dominant narrative of a steady and positive progression for integration.

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<sup>10</sup> There has perennially been an emphasis on segregated black institutions rather than integrated institutions championed by Blacks as a method of emphasizing and celebrating black traditions and black culture rather than trying to fit in to a white-defined norm. Although this mentality did exist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, segregation was less a choice for black students than it was a lack of options afforded by the white government in power.



Figure 5.1: Map showing locations of New Orleans public schools by school type, 2013

### One Day, in the Village...

It is Memorial Day at Chalmette Battlefield, and the sun rises on a spectacular day for commemorations. A breeze flutters several thousand American flags in the cemetery planted on graves by Boy Scouts over the weekend. A corps of Vietnam War veterans will arrive shortly to raise the cemetery flag in salute. The park superintendent prepares a short speech.

Outside the cemetery, heading toward the monument, in the middle of the field, a ranger prepares the second activity of the day – the annual Fazendeville baseball tournament. She lays a chalk line where first base will go, and helps move benches into position. After the pomp and

circumstance in the cemetery is over, spectators and local school children will migrate to the field to partake in a Memorial Day celebration almost as old as the cemetery itself.

In Fazendeville's day, the residents were neither invited nor interested in participating in the sanctified Memorial Day tradition, and so established their own: a baseball game and a potluck feast to follow. Then, these celebrations were mutually exclusive and fiercely segregated. Today, they are enjoyed by all. Dignitaries from the cemetery come, as well as local children, parents and community members to the ersatz ball field to stretch, throw a ball, and secure a good seat. Another ranger scurries in and out of the visitor center, setting up warming trays to receive the dishes neighbors will bring for the feast. The ball game is about to begin. The parish president throws out a ceremonial first pitch, a high school senior sings the National Anthem, and everyone pauses for a moment of silence. They reflect on the thousands of lives this battlefield claimed, the thousands sleeping in the cemetery – soldiers white and black – and to reflect on perhaps the greatest tragedy of all: generations of hatred perpetuated between neighbors. Memorial Day has quickly become a favorite holiday of local residents and Fazendeville descendants. It is an opportunity to come together to remember, to celebrate, to catch up, and most importantly to be together and reflect on the simple, joyful moments that remind us there's no place like home.

### **Encountering, not Avoiding Race**

Just as the Amistad School is a vision that cap-ends this requiem and projects the possibilities of the future, so is this ideal Memorial Day celebration. This is not a way Chalmette Battlefield celebrates Memorial Day, favoring instead traditional offerings of flags, speeches, and maybe a band. But why shouldn't it be celebrated this way? As stewards of the site, with a



role to protect and preserve its culture, history, and tradition, the National Park Service has an obligation to ensure that these traditions are upheld. I would argue especially since this is an endangered story<sup>11</sup> there is an even more dire need to be part of its preservation. So far this hasn't happened,<sup>12</sup> further marginalizing the narrative of Fazendeville.

Yet through its existence, its memory and its absence, Fazendeville creates an interesting and compelling counterpart for the dominant narrative and the counternarrative of race and integration in New Orleans. As a subdivision of property owned by Jean-Pierre Fazende who parceled it out and sold it off as lots to emancipated slaves and free people of color following the Civil War, the Village developed an entirely separate tradition both in its existence and in its schools. Fazendeville consciously rejected integration with Whites in a time when school integration was entering into the mainstream discourse, in the interest of maintaining autonomy through segregation. Rather than fitting into a dominant construction of the ideal and approximate white life as best they could, the residents of Fazendeville rejected this and embraced another narrative. Perhaps not surprisingly, this narrative neither upholds the dominant narrative nor the New Orleans counternarrative. It exists as yet another layer in a cyclical and infinitely complex story.

The dominant narrative emphasizes black struggle for survival, which certainly was true of the residents of Fazendeville, facing the discrimination of Jim Crow, poverty, and a lack of education and economic opportunities due to the white-controlled government. But it also challenges this narrative, not just surviving, but thriving through the Great Migration that

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of endangered culture and endangered history is not an immediately obvious one. Americans are widely familiar with the concept of endangered species, but the idea that a culture can go extinct much like an animal can is not necessarily as well emphasized. Yet Fazendeville provides the concrete example that endangering a tradition is all too easy.

<sup>12</sup> This omission is perhaps out of shame for the role that the NPS played in the destruction of the Village, perhaps out of a lack of awareness or interest in this story and its traditions, or perhaps because of the simple and overwhelming power of hegemony.

dissolved so many similar Southern communities, through storms and floods constantly threatening to wipe it away, and the limitations afforded by second-class status. But ultimately this community could not overcome deeply held dominant racist ideologies that rendered its narrative secondary to the dominant narrative of the battlefield it occupied, and so therefore less important. If Fazendeville had been located elsewhere perhaps it would have been spared. But such as it was, it not only conflicted with the dominant narrative, it actively threatened it. And so in the 1960s, at precisely the height of anti-integration sentiment, this segregated black community was bought up and torn down to make way for more valuable history (See Figure 5.2 and 5.3).

The common center of these concentric narratives challenging the accepted historical account of integration is race. It is the elephant in the room, the obvious factor which a modern post-modern “race blind” society has taught us to politely ignore. Yet doing so also ignores the important role that race and by extension culture and experience play in framing and shaping understanding, robbing an education narrative of context and giving privilege to the default and dominant story rather than exploring what role race has played in shaping our understandings.<sup>13</sup>

In the example of Fazendeville, the choice to preserve the dominant narrative, emphasizing and enshrining a distant white history at the expense of the counternarrative and more localized black experience is obvious and literal.<sup>14</sup> Fazendeville and its example of black agency and a desire to segregated and thrive independently, its ability to educate and provide for its own not only challenged the dominant narrative of white power, white agency and white history, its existence occupying a parcel of land that would help enshrining this dominant

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<sup>13</sup> Peller, “Race consciousness,” 127-158.

<sup>14</sup> The decision to not privilege the Fazendeville narrative in this case led to its literal, physical destruction. Giving preference to one narrative over another doesn’t always bring about such literal destruction, but almost without exception damage is done.



Figure 5.2: View of Fazendeville, looking east, c. 1950<sup>15</sup>



Figure 5.3: View of Fazendeville, looking east; January 8, 1965<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; New Orleans, La.

narrative frames it as a direct challenge. The white response, in an effort to preserve its own narrative, was to eliminate this aberration.

Whitewashing the narratives of integrated education in New Orleans, while bringing less literal destruction than that of Fazendeville, still brings damage. Instead of appreciating the narrative of integration in New Orleans as an empowering and innovative process led by people of color in repeated attempts to achieve integration despite setbacks,<sup>17</sup> whitewashing the narrative calls into question whether this population is serious about education and interested in having access to good schools. Ignoring the true narrative in favor of the dominant and simpler narrative suggests that it was only at the whim of Whites that integration was ever possible. This taints not only the general understanding of what has happened historically, but also taints the understanding of the origins of the segregated and unequal system of education in place in New Orleans today and downplays how pervasive, historically-derived and serious this issue of segregation is. Instead of complicating and enriching the story, a dominant theoretical framework privileging one set of experiences over those of a group labeled as “Other” is further reinforced, leaving us all the poorer for not knowing of its richness.<sup>18</sup>

This emphasis on race as a significant characteristic<sup>19</sup> separating people into distinct and often mutually-exclusive groups is a direct byproduct of this embrace of a dominant narrative on race and integration.<sup>20</sup> According to Molly Andrews, the emphasis on boundaries of identity in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> A key goal directly connected to efforts for integration are efforts at promoting equality. A challenge is posed when the goals for integration move away from ensuring that all students have equal opportunities and equal access and into integrating by race for the sake of integrating, with a blind eye to the damaging results of segregation.

<sup>18</sup> Andrews, “Exploring Cross-Cultural Boundaries,” 507.

<sup>19</sup> Race is treated not only as a culturally significant distinction, but as a biologically significant one as well. Although racist belief structures such as eugenics and biological inferiority connected to race are no longer widely held positions as they once were, there is still a fundamental dominant understanding of there being some physical or biological attribute to race that distinguishes people more than just the amount of melanin in one’s skin.

<sup>20</sup> W.E.B DuBois struggled with the concept of “double-consciousness” more than a century ago, struggling with this same question of how to navigate different spheres of identity. Ultimately DuBois doesn’t have an answer to

turn contributes to a general belief in the “moral superiority of the position from which we emanate,”<sup>21</sup> blinding us to our shared history. William Pinar would argue that this limited perspective “deforms us all.”<sup>22</sup> The process of this deformation is ignorance onset by a lack of historical context. By denying the circuitous, complicated, alinear narratives of integration of Southeast Louisiana, Barbara Morgan-Fleming et al.’s critical question: “As our attention is called to once facet of an event, what aspects are nudged into shadow?”<sup>23</sup> goes unasked. This blunts the critical mind to the possibilities of other perspectives and other realities, serving to further reinforce a false status quo, and normalizes our current system of segregation and inequality as historical and acceptable, when it is neither.

This dominant narrative privileging the white experience is a historically engrained one, a product of the development of a plantation economy in the American south, contributing to the establishment of the property value and cultural dominance of whiteness.<sup>24</sup> In Reconstruction, passing for white was a culminating effort of generations of association with white social institutions and white culture. This often involved being mistaken for white due to increasingly light skin achieved through a conscious effort to intermarry with partners of lighter skin, but was not always so literal. Dark-skinned people could also “pass” for white not through appearance but through behavior and social position.

Today, “passing” for white is not only still present in New Orleans society and culture, it is required of school students. While outward appearance on its own has little bearing today on

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this quandary, merely identifying the challenge of the black experience in navigating two entirely separate identities. Although this treatment of race as an “either” is evolving into an “and” with more widespread acceptance of multiracial identities, there is still a difficult space which must be navigated.

<sup>21</sup> Andrews, “Exploring Cross-Cultural Boundaries,” 507.

<sup>22</sup> Pinar et al., *Understanding Curriculum*, 330.

<sup>23</sup> Fleming et al., “Narrative Inquiry in Archival Work,” 82.

<sup>24</sup> Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South: from Slavery to Civil Rights*.

opportunities,<sup>25</sup> the ability for black students to “pass” for white and thereby excel at white social institutions such as schools is one of very few paths for upward mobility. Excelling academically, attending a university, and continuing in a linear path of greater opportunities, prestige, and money that an education provides is critical to escaping a cycle of disadvantage. But this requires students to choose success or their cultural identity, with few options to have both. Students who do not meet these academic goals, whether through ill-preparedness or conscious rejection, are judged on a scale of acceptability defined by the dominant white narrative – privileging high test scores, good grades, and good behavior. If a black student achieves these white standards, they do good. If they don’t, they fail.

Yet this system built on the property value of whiteness celebrates an arbitrary physical characteristic. Like hair color, eye color, body shape, weight, color has no biological value, but unlike these other arbitrary traits, has significant cultural and especially social value. It is also a physical characteristic that is very difficult to alter cosmetically. You can color your hair, you can wear contacts, but your skin color will always be the color that it is. Centuries of a race-based system of inequality is why skin color is treated differently than any other characteristic, and while arbitrary, it is deeply engrained. Ignoring this tradition and its legacy as products of arbitrary privileging and classification is dangerously shortsighted to the pervasive damage and inequality that American society and history has fostered. And so whiteness, intentionally or not, holds a property value.

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<sup>25</sup> Although overt racism and race-based prejudice still exist, they are not dominant positions the way that they once were, making race a less meaningful characteristic than it once was in opening or restricting opportunities a person has. However, culture associated with blackness and the expectations that it brings are still very much present. A black university student might be accused of “pretending to be white” by his peer, or a white teenager interested in hip hop derided as “acting black” by classmates. Although the concept of limitations based solely on race have dissipated, there are still firm social beliefs on the impervious role of race in culture.

This property value of whiteness and the system of education that reaffirms it contribute to a mutually debilitating “myth of race” that affirmed a binary racial identity: white or black. But in challenging these binary distinctions we are able to blend our understanding of race and acknowledge it dually as relevant, but also as arbitrary.<sup>26</sup> Our values, interests, learning styles and preferences are significantly shaped by our experiences and by our culture, and often by extension our race, even if race itself has only cultural bearing. Especially in context of education, although we must move past the skin-deep differences of race, we cannot ignore the role that these factors of cultural awareness play.

In Reconstruction, challenging race was very literal as the more affluent classes including those *gens du couleur libres* from before the Civil War attempted to fit into white society as closely as they could through literal and figurative association with whiteness. The notion of how blackness is defined was challenged, such as through the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* where in addition to challenging the legal precedent for segregation, also challenged an elaborate system of race classification where “one drop of black blood” defined blackness despite outward appearance. Today, CRT challenges the role of race by reconsidering how it functions in education spaces. Rather than deferring to the dominant narrative in education, CRT models of cultural relevancy demand celebrating race and cultural diversity and letting these identities inform development the development of a curriculum and a system of education centered on race and culture.

The approach to integration thus far in New Orleans has been a process of permitting black students entry into white schools, while encouraging them to adopt white education

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<sup>26</sup> The notion of race is arbitrary – there are only cultural differences that assign significance or relevance to the otherwise skin-deep distinctions of race. But with centuries of cultural emphasis on race, today racial differences because of their association with cultural differences are significant in helping to shape a person’s worldview, values, and traditions.



conventions<sup>27</sup> and “pass” for white – culturally and socially if not literally. But according to critical race theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings, a “lack of cultural synchronization” forces students to further embrace dominant white cultural characteristics rather than allowing students to “choose academic excellence, yet still identify with African American culture.”<sup>28</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw echoes this concern for a lack of cultural relevancy, calling for a new approach which “focuses on the needs of the African-American community.”<sup>29</sup> CRT guides with ideas of what the ideal looks like, but what is the path ahead to achieve these ideals?

## Conclusions

This research has posed four primary questions:

- 1) What is the narrative of school integration in New Orleans and how does it differ from the dominant narrative of integration?
- 2) How does focusing on the black community of Fazendeville further challenge the dominant narratives of school integration?
- 3) What role does race play in the construction of these counternarratives of school integration?
- 4) How do considering the property value of whiteness and challenging traditional understandings of race help to theorize race in the narrative (and counternarrative) of integration in New Orleans?

As this research has demonstrated, the narrative of school integration in New Orleans differs markedly from the dominant narrative. It has followed a cyclical pattern of successes and failures in establishing integrated schools and started a full century earlier than the dominant narrative

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<sup>27</sup> I define “white” education conventions such as an emphasis on a “Latin” curriculum, the emphasis on four-year universities and an emphasis on academic excellence over other types of knowledge. School systems are geared toward students getting the best grades they possibly can, and going on to an undergraduate education, graduate after that if they are exceedingly successful, and post-graduate for the elite. This model gives significant preference to those with the (white-derived) cultural capital to access those systems, and labels students who cannot achieve those goals – those who excel in non-academic vocational fields, or those without the financial means, interest or ability to continue on to this level – as failures.

<sup>28</sup> Ladson-Billings, *The Dream-Keepers: successful teachers of African American children*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Race, Reform and Retrenchment: transformation and legitimation in antidiscrimination law,” in K. Crenshaw et al, ed., *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement*, (New York: the New Press, 1995), 119.



suggests. The path has not been a concise and linear positive progression from segregation in 1954 to liberation and equality today, it has been complex and halting, with periods of great success and periods of deep drawback. Fazendeville further challenges this narrative by introducing a divergent example of a black community electing to self-segregate, including its school, rather than integrate although the option was available. This knocks school integration as the universal ideal from its pedestal as early as integration was first broadly conceptualized in New Orleans, during Reconstruction. This challenges not just a narrative on integration, but the very understanding of what the role of integration is.

I have identified these counternarratives through documenting archival materials from personal, official, and newspaper accounts of integration and through analyzing statistical data confirming the pervasive presence of segregation in schools still today. The public schools in New Orleans experimented with integration at the height of Reconstruction, but this attempt was ultimately a failure. The interest in integration – both for black and white – lapsed for the next century, with most parents preferring quality but segregated institutions rather than navigate the increasing racial pressures of fighting for integration. Nearly a century after the first integration attempt stalled, in the midst of the modern civil rights movement, the schools would reinstate the conversation based on pressure from the black community and the Supreme Court, rationalizing that the only way to bridge differences of race was through integration. Three generations have followed, and somehow we are still struggling with the same questions.

But the nature of archival study is that it is subject to considerable interpretation, with the understanding of the researcher limited by experience, interest, prejudice, and bias. Hanging over all of this are the social biases of which we have limited control and often even consciousness of – the bias of the dominant narrative that privileges one story over another. This colors our

knowledge and understandings as researchers, shaped not by what has happened, but what society chooses to remember.<sup>30</sup> And so in making these historical explorations, we gain not just an appreciation for what has happened in our past, but perhaps more importantly “where we have come from and how we have become what we are.”<sup>31</sup>

Understanding these narratives is critical not just to unveiling greater truths and challenging deeply held assumptions, but to preserving stories that can otherwise so easily be forgotten. And in this ignorance of our own true identities and experiences, we construct a foundation for our identities going ahead that is only a house of cards. *Sankofa* is a word of the Akan people of Ghana symbolized by a heart-shaped design that roughly translates to “go back and get it.” It is used as a reminder, in picture and in proverb, of the importance of learning from the past, lest we forget its lessons, pictured in Figure 5.4.

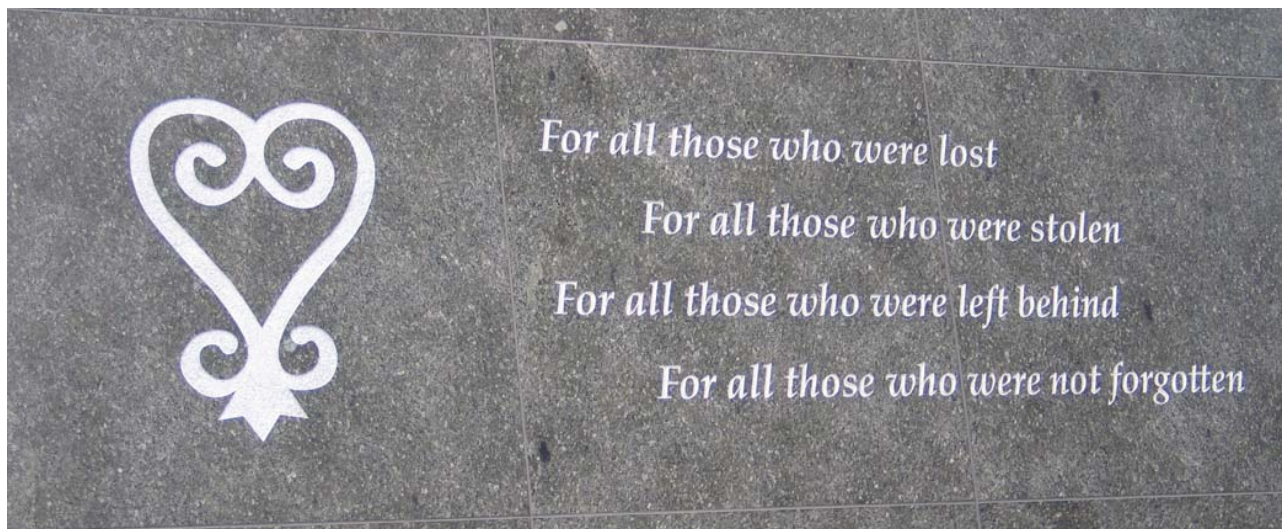


Figure 5.4: Photograph of *sankofa* from African Burial Ground National Monument<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wood, *The Purpose of the Past*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>32</sup> African Burial Ground National Monument; New York, NY. The African Burial Ground memorializes the African diaspora by entombing remains of 17<sup>th</sup> century slaves and free people unearched during a 21<sup>st</sup> century construction project.

Louisiana and especially New Orleans and its environs have lived through a difficult past of hate, of violence, and of a lack of compassion for our fellow humans, all built upon the very artificial and literally skin-deep distinctions of race. It is critical that we constantly return to this past to remember its lessons – how far we have come, and how far we still need to go.

Uncovering and understanding a complex historical narrative is key to putting a critical eye to identifying what path lies ahead. According to historian Gordon Wood, “without a future there cannot be much interest in the past.”<sup>33</sup> Framing this research as a requiem suggests that a time has come to abandon the failed attempts at integration, yet in that abandonment an optimistic future is assured. But what is the path to this paradise? Integration has certainly demonstrated itself as a theoretical vision; is it possible to realize this?

There is little doubt that integration thus far has been a failure. The black population of New Orleans today is largely concentrated in the urban city center, resulting in a majority black population in the city itself and a majority white population in the surrounding and growing suburbs. Connected to the racial divide is great wealth inequality, with neighborhoods and their schools segregated by custom, practice, and price tag, even if no longer by law. White students attend the suburban schools, the expensive private schools, and the parochial schools, with black students concentrated in the impoverished, underperforming city schools.<sup>34</sup> It is a devastating and perpetual cycle of misunderstanding, disadvantage and inequality.

Jonathan Kozol argues that efforts on integration should be altogether abandoned, emphasizing instead quality culturally-relevant schools tailored to meet the needs of diverse and disparate populations.<sup>35</sup> Kozol’s conclusion is a counterintuitive one, but in a way attractive.

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<sup>33</sup> Wood, *The Purpose of the Past*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Tulane University, *The State of Public Education in New Orleans*.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: the restoration of apartheid schooling in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

Suggesting to let integrated schools and an integrated society expire as a way of ensuring equal access reflects a somewhat bleak but perhaps realist perspective on the progress of this historical narrative and the persistence and inevitability of racial inequality.

Derrick A. Bell, Jr. argues that the functional racial isolation of schools and of broader communities makes implementing integration nearly impossible.<sup>36</sup> But he also argues that integration was never a product of equality, it was a means to achieving American progress in a global context in the 1950s.<sup>37</sup> Since integration was artificial to begin with, there would be no point in trying to resuscitate this failed model. The alternate that Bell provides is to abandon obsessing over this fairly arbitrary goal of increasing black attendance in otherwise white schools. He argues “programs mandated by the courts – ‘antidefiance, racial balance’ plans – may in some cases be inferior to plans focusing on ‘educational components,’ including the creation and development of ‘model’ all-black schools.”<sup>38</sup>

This alternative model addresses the problem that simply redrawing district lines and providing more bus access to diversify schools has no bearing on their quality. Instead he proposes a refocused approach where “black children, parents, and teachers can utilize the real cultural strengths of the black community to overcome the many barriers to education achievement.”<sup>39</sup> Bell would agree with Kozol that segregation is appropriate – but focuses on improving quality, not concerning himself with other statistical data about the population.

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<sup>36</sup> Bell, “*Brown v. Board of Education and Interest Convergence*,” 20.

<sup>37</sup> Bell argues that integration and the formal recognition of the civil rights movement was a calculated political move to counter communist influence. One of the strongest anti-American and anti-democratic arguments in the 1950s was contrasting American liberation ideology with the persecuted black population of the nation. Integration and black enfranchisement, according to Bell, was little more than an acquiesce by white power to ensure broader political goals.

<sup>38</sup> Bell, “*Brown v. Board of Education and Interest Convergence*,” 24.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 26.

Gloria Ladson-Billings similarly emphasizes that “race still matters,”<sup>40</sup> in this dialogue on the role of race in integration, but would not go so far as to insist that segregated schools are the only option. In the conclusion of *Dreamkeepers: successful teachers of African American students*, she poses, “I began this book with a question: Do African American students need separate schools? I conclude with an answer: What African American students need are *better* schools.”<sup>41</sup> Instead of insisting on abandoning integration, Ladson-Billings emphasizes the importance of framing a system of education to meet the needs and cultural experience of minority students, including proposing a curriculum of cultural relevancy,<sup>42</sup> and training and recruiting teachers to be interested and sensitive to the cultural and educational special needs of black students. Above all, Ladson-Billings argues for the importance of using a reframed curriculum to meet the diverse and divergent experiences of black students rather than continuing to force them as a square peg into the round hole of a white system of education.

In the efforts at integration thus far, race has been treated only as a characterizing factor, as a way of distinguishing “majority” from “minority,” and as a metric to understand how mixed the schools are. There has been no systematic effort to incorporate the complexities of race into the operation of integrated schools through a curriculum of cultural relevancy tailored to meet the needs of diverse communities or to treat race as anything other than a “just another example of the range of arbitrary social characteristics – like gender, physical handicap, or sexual preference – that right-thinking people should learn to ignore.”<sup>43</sup> White culture is privileged as the default, with black students required to assimilate, and those who can’t failing out of this

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<sup>40</sup> Ladson-Billings, Forward to Dixson and Rousseau, vi.

<sup>41</sup> Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers*, 149.

<sup>42</sup> By “curriculum of cultural relevancy,” Ladson-Billings alludes to a curriculum which contextualizes lesson subject material through students’ lived cultural experience.

<sup>43</sup> Peller, “Race-Consciousness,” 150.

system built upon the assumption of the property value of whiteness and its associated cultural capital.<sup>44</sup>

I argue there is no universal solution to this crisis, and maintaining a local, even microperspective is key to figuring out a solution that works. Despite many nominal attempts at integration, I argue that no *real*, holistic and comprehensive attempt has yet been made that considers these microperspectives and needs of individual students, teachers, and classrooms. Thus far, integration hasn't been about equality, it has implied otherness. It has placed whiteness on a pedestal while asking diverse students to strive for that artificial norm. As early as the Freedman's Bureau, schools were empowering the community as educators to ensure that student needs were being met, successfully, and out of necessity for lack of other options. Somewhere between then and now this spirit of innovation and acknowledgement of racial diversity has disappeared and we are left scratching our heads for how to solve this ongoing crisis.

Integration cannot simply be the process of white schools which black students are allowed to attend with didactic instruction of whose culture and whose traditions have value. It cannot be a cookie-cutter plan handed down from distant, if well-meaning authorities. Instead, let all this ideology, the narrative and the attempts of integration expire as we broadly reconceptualize and reframe integration to mean not assimilating black into white, but to mean celebrating diversity and using it to empower and inform a system of education. Race is not a "four-letter word." It is not something to be ashamed of or to use to establish "otherness." It is a powerful force uniting culture, tradition and community in potentially revolutionary and exciting ways. Whatever the path ahead is, it must be one that permits students to be proud and aware of

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<sup>44</sup> Ladson-Billings, *The Dream-Keepers: successful teachers of African American children*.

their cultural traditions and how race, diversity, and individuality informs who they are, the giants upon whose shoulders they stand, and helps them understand the people they can become.

New Orleans can be a difficult city to understand. It is both greatly progressive and greatly traditional. It is prone to disaster, with a history steeped in difficult race relations, increasingly impoverished, increasingly violent, and increasingly bifurcated by class and race. Too often, the city and its schools are dismissed as post-industrial, post-Katrina wrecks of a troubled society that have failed to integrate because of underlying and impervious racist perspectives leading back for centuries. But this glib reading denies the value of the diverse and celebratory culture of a city of innovators, improvisationalists and optimists who are empowered by diverse culture and race, not held back. There is not a city in this country so culturally diverse and well-positioned to fundamentally and radically reconceptualize the role of race and integration. And it can because with one false narrative at last gone, a new future can be assured.

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## Appendix

### Population data, 1860 - 2010<sup>1</sup>

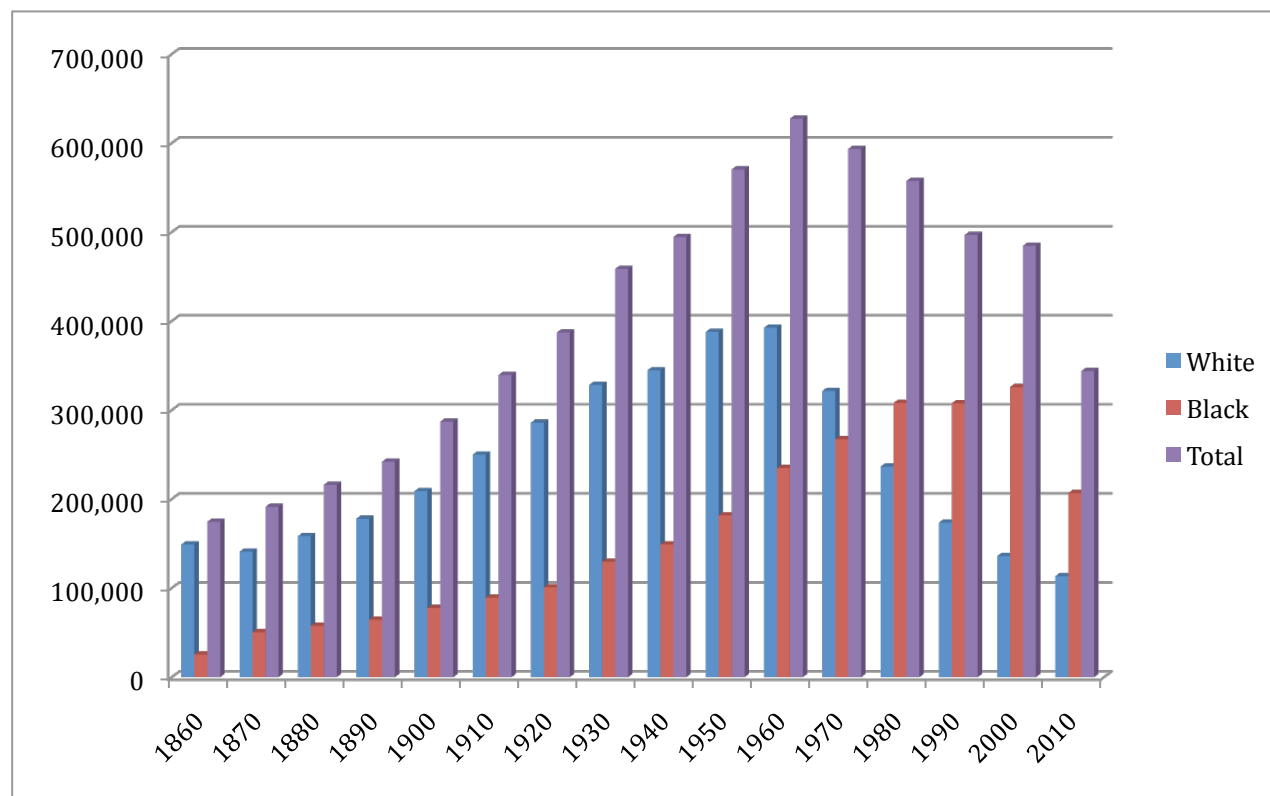


Figure A.1: Population of New Orleans, 1860 – 2010

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, "Population of the United States in 1860; compiled from the original returns of the eight census," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864); Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census. "The Ninth Census," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872); Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, "Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882); Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census. "Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895); Department of the Interior, Census Reports, "Twelfth Census of the United States: Population," (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.: 1901); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the year 1910* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the year 1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932); Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States*; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *A Report of the Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population: 1950* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population: 1960* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of the Population*; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of the Population, Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics: Louisiana* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992); Bureau of the Census, *Louisiana: 2000*; Census Bureau, *Louisiana: 2010*.

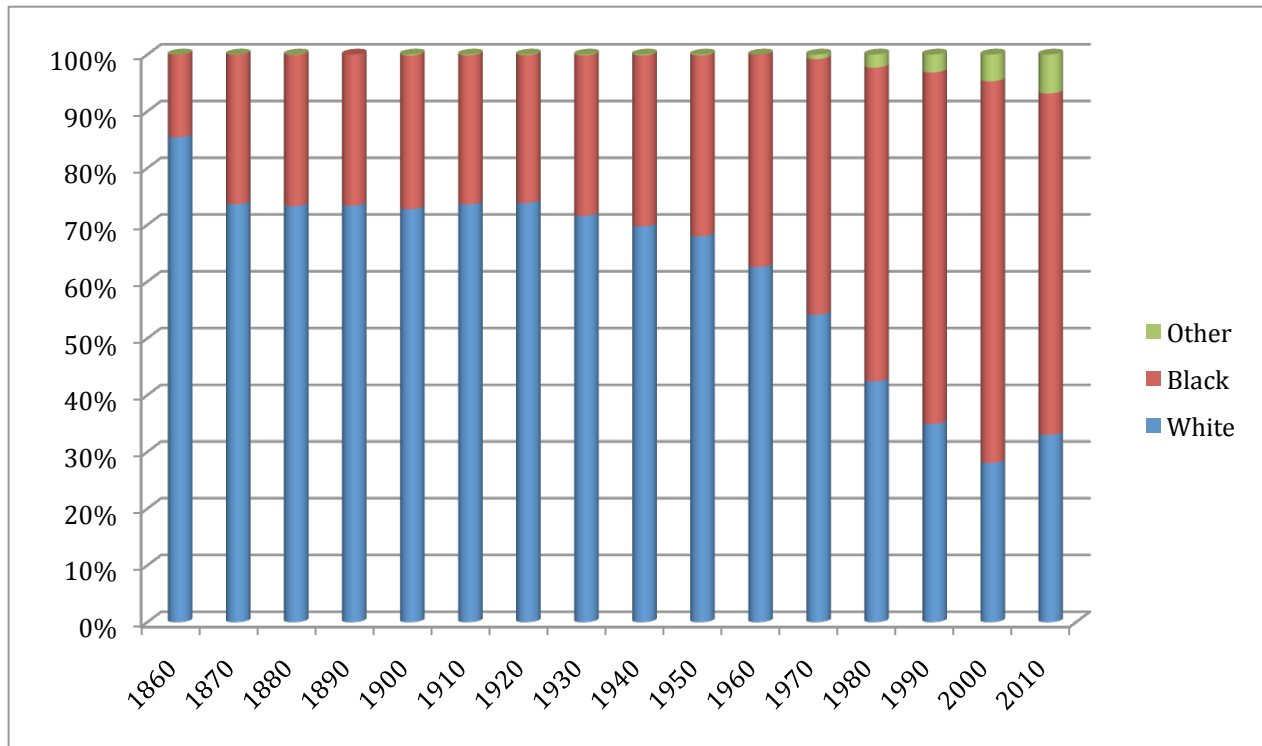


Figure A.2: Percentage of population of New Orleans by race, 1860 – 2010

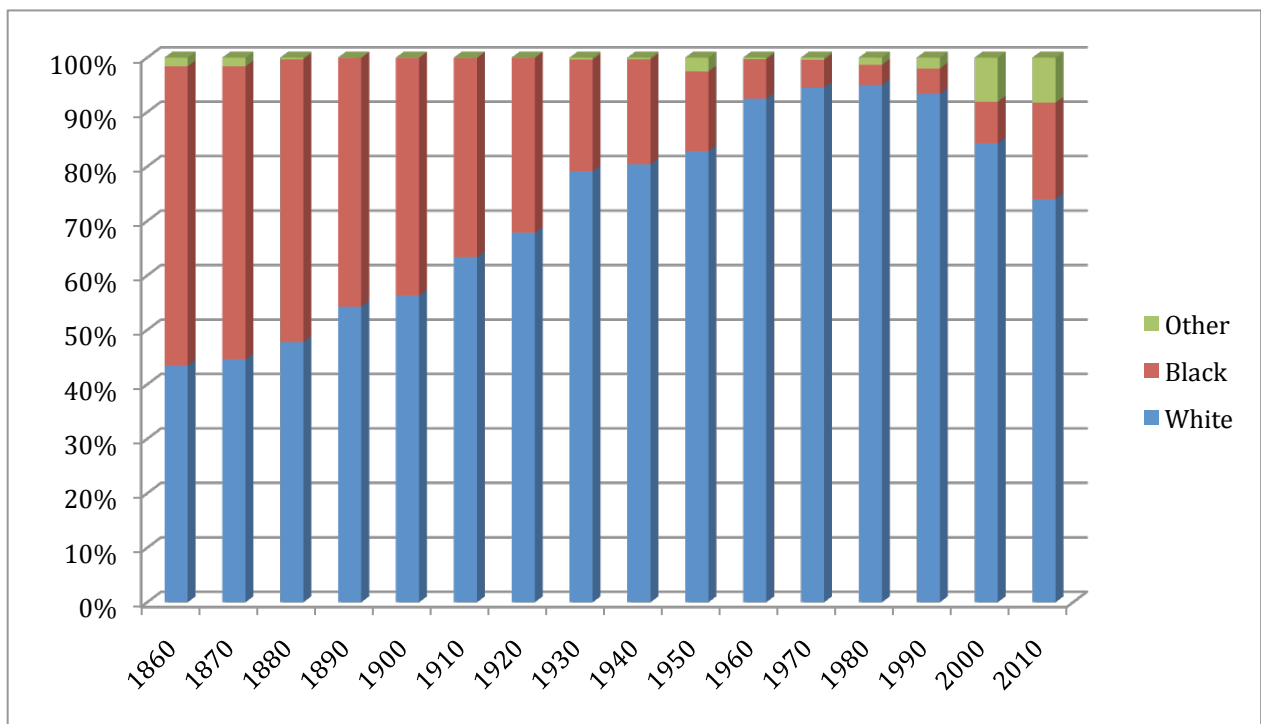


Figure A.3: Percentage of population of St. Bernard Parish by race, 1860 – 2010

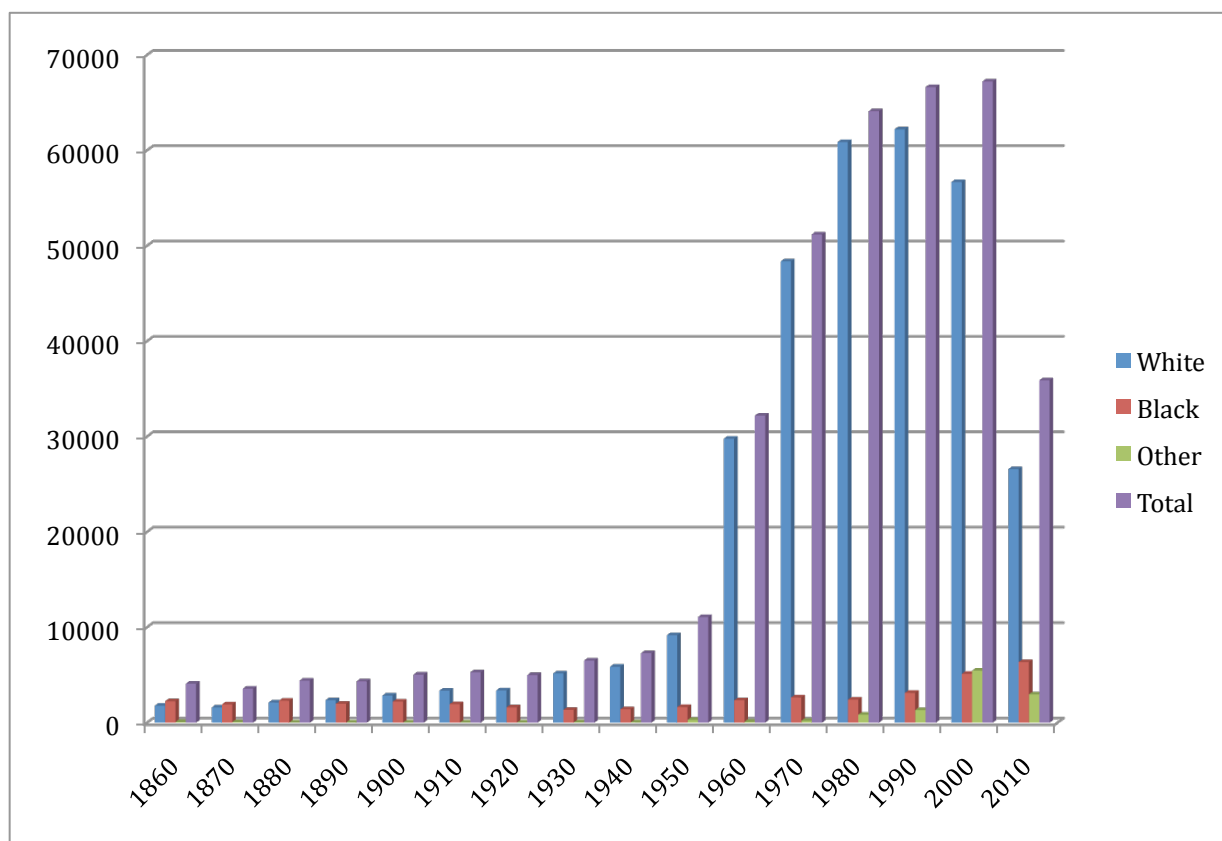


Figure A.4: Population of St. Bernard Parish, 1860 - 2010

## **Vita**

April Antonellis received her bachelor's degrees at New York University in 2008. While at NYU, she began working as a teaching assistant at P.S. 40 in Manhattan, and discovered a love and passion for education. Upon graduation, she accepted a position at Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty National Monument as an education and youth programs coordinator, and developed a curiosity for the many worlds of education that exist outside of the classroom. In 2011, April left New York and relocated to New Orleans, Louisiana, to accept a position at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, and to pursue a master's degree in the School of Education at Louisiana State University. Upon receipt of her degree in 2013, April plans to continue working with the National Park Service as an education specialist.